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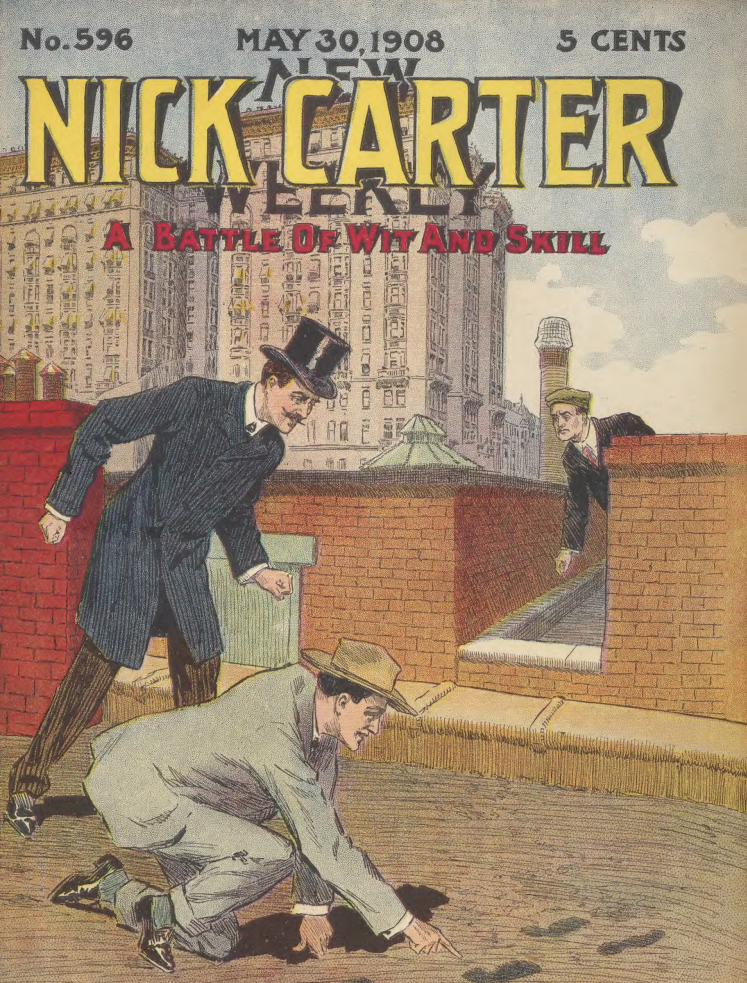
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A BATTLE OF WIT AND SKILL



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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A Battle of Wit and Skill

OR,

NICK CARTER MEETS WITH DEFIANCE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A PRINCE AND AN IMPOSTOR.

Nick Carter gazed in amazement at the card which Joseph handed to him, for he read upon it the name of the man whom only yesterday he had succeeded in arresting after one of the most puzzling cases of his experience; a man who had forthwith been committed to the tombs to await trial for a series of robberies of the most remarkable character that had ever happened in the annals of New York City.

At least, the name he read upon the card—it was written in pencil—was the one that the prisoner had given to go upon the court records, and at the particular moment of the event, neither the police commissioner nor himself had seen fit to offer a correction.

The fact that Nick had recognized him for what he really was had been communicated to no one but the commissioner, and they had agreed between themselves to keep the matter a secret, at least for the present; and that there had been more than one good reason for the decision will presently appear.

The name scrawled upon the card was "Sindahr Goosh"—a name which the reader will at once recognize as belonging to that part of the world which lies in the mountainous region at the northern extremity of India; but the name by which Nick Carter knew the man, and by which, without the disguise, he was known in "high" society in the city of New York, was no less than "Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton."

As the prince, as a descendant of royalty, this man had suddenly appeared in New York society, taking it by storm; for the "Smart Set" of the metropolis dearly loves a prince, and had not hesitated to accept him as such.

And he had flashed like a meteor across the social sky, and was, in fact, at the very zenith of his successes, at the time of his arrest.

But all these matters will appear later on.

"Sindahr Goosh, eh?" mused the detective, half-aloud, as he glanced at the name. "Now how in the

It is suggested that the reader procure and read No. 595 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Crystal Mystery," which gives a good idea of Sindar Goosh, called "The Hindu."—EDITOR.

world did he get out, I wonder? Found some one to bail him, I suppose."

He was still puzzling over the matter when, five minutes later, he entered the small reception-room at the front of the house, where the man was waiting.

He rose as Nick entered, and stood silently before him—and he certainly looked the part he was playing if ever a man did so.

Tall and straight as an arrow, with the vibrant nostrils of a thoroughbred horse and the thin but shapely lips of a passionate, but self-controlled spirit; with gleaming white teeth and a complexion of light, transparent brown, such as, perhaps, you have seen in the faces of many high-caste Hindus.

But the most remarkable feature about him were his eyes.

They were truly wonderful, in size, shape, setting, and power, as well as in expression.

Large and dark and round and set wide apart, they glowed and burned, or were subdued and tender, according to the subject the man happened to be discussing, or the emotions he happened to be experiencing at the moment. "Magic eyes" the detective had called them once, and indeed the description seemed to have been well selected, for they were magic in their wonderful power over some people.

The man was lithe and supple, suggesting at once the leopard and the serpent, and his broad, high forehead, shapely and well-poised head and perfect features, were outward evidences of a keen and alert intelligence above the possession of most men.

But he was a thief for all that. A strange and remarkable thief, too; in fact, it would have been impossible for this individual to have done anything that he did not render in some way distinctly remarkable and different.

Nick Carter stopped just inside the door and stood there silently waiting for the man to speak, which he presently did.

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Carter?" he asked.

"Somewhat," was the noncommittal reply.

"I was admitted to bail this morning. It was a heavy one, however; ten thousand dollars."

"And you had no difficulty in procuring it?" asked Nick.

"None whatever, Mr. Carter; in proof of which statement, I am here."

"So I see. But why are you here?"

"I came directly from the court where I was admitted to bail—where, thanks to your kindness, I am known only as Sindahr Goosh."

"You need not thank me for it. There was no consideration for you whatever behind my concealment of your true character—or, rather, or your other imposture."

"I did not flatter myself that it was out of consideration for me, sir; but I did suppose that it was consideration for others whom I have known—and still know, as Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton."

"No; I will not even admit that. So far as I am concerned, it came about merely as a matter of expediency," said the detective coldly. "You are such a consummate scoundrel, so entirely an ingrate, a thief and swindler, and you have imposed so cruelly upon those who have befriended you, that I thought it would be well to look up your record quite thoroughly before—— Oh, well, I need not explain. You are not worth it."

The pseudo Hindu bowed his head ironically and his white teeth showed in a quick smile.

"At all events," he said, "the fact remains that so far as the world is at present concerned, the 'Hypnotic Thief' whom you arrested is still Sindahr Goosh, a Hindu-Brahman from the upper Punjab. It is not known, save to you and the police commissioner, and possibly to your assistants, that there is any connection between Sindahr Goosh and Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton. That is correct, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Very well, then, Mr. Carter, I have come to you this morning to ascertain if it were not possible to make some sort of a bargain with you, to——"

He paused suddenly, for the detective had taken a quick step toward him, and there was a dangerous gleam in Nick Carter's eyes that would the next instant have developed into a blow, had not the man before him hastened to explain.

"Pray do not misunderstand me," he called out quickly. "I have nothing to propose which can offend you."

"You began mightily like it," replied Nick. "It would be a dangerous suggestion for you to make, Danton. I will call you Danton for the present, till I know what your real name is."

"Mr. Carter, I know you far too well to dare to suggest such a thing as any arrangement which you could not ultimately reveal to all the world."

"Well, tell me what you did mean."

"Merely this, Mr. Carter: That I want your permission to return for two days, or, possibly, three, to

my rôle as the prince, in order that I may take proper leave of those who know me as such, and thus avoid bringing any of them into unpleasant notoriety; after which I will again become Sindahr Goosh and in that character—this one—make full confession of all that is charged against me, and take my medicine in whatever way it is handed out to me. That is the bargain I had to propose."

The detective was thoughtful for a moment. Then he said:

"Be a trifle more explicit, Danton, before I answer you."

"Very well. You are familiar, of course, with my career here in New York, as the prince."

"More or less so; yes."

"You know that I have been well received—received everywhere, in fact, and made much of in all circles?"

"Yes."

"Possibly you have also heard upon what familiar terms I stand with the family of Peter Vanderdyken?"

"I have heard something about it; probably not all of it."

"To be entirely frank with you, Mr. Carter, I have asked Marguerite Vanderdyken to marry me, and she has accepted. Her father does not know the facts yet, nor her mother, although both parents have been so well disposed toward me that I have never doubted receiving their consent to the arrangement. In fact, I have received what might be called assurances from old Peter, to that effect."

"Well?"

"Mr. Carter, I have taught that girl to love me. She does love me. My sole purpose in applying to you this morning is to secure your consent to a plan I have formed for relieving her of and from this tangle with me, with as little suffering as possible."

"I will hear what your proposition is, Danton."

"Before I make it let me say one more thing."

"Well?"

"I knew perfectly well that if I returned to society to-day as Prince Edouard, you would at once rearrest me as an impostor—or upon some charge, at least."

"I certainly should have done so, Danton."

"That would have let the cat out of the bag, so to speak. The social world would have been informed at once that I was a thief, Marguerite would have been told, and she would have suffered, not only the anguish of finding her lover out for what he is, but also the terrible humiliation that would have followed upon my exposure."

"Yes. There is no doubt of all that."

"Now; in arresting me as you did, I have no doubt that you first collected sufficient evidence to convict me."

"You may be sure of that."

"I know that you are thorough. But to secure that conviction, even with the evidence you have, there would have to be a jury trial, would there not?"

"Certainly."

"That would cause considerable expense to the State, much delay, and great notoriety; eh?"

"Yes."

"I propose to save you and the State all that, if you will come to an agreement with me."

"Danton, understand one thing. I will make no agreement whatever with you for any consideration regarding what you will or will not do or perform later on. If I agree with what you have to propose to me, it will be done only out of consideration for those you have so grievously wronged. Tell me what you have come here to ask me, and I will give my consent to its performance, or I will refuse to do so, just according to what my ideas of right and wrong shall dictate. I will make no bargain with you. You may ask what favors of me you will, and I shall grant them or refuse them as I see fit. I shall neither ask, nor consent to receive any favors from you."

"As you will, Mr. Carter," replied Danton, shrugging his shoulders. "Then it only remains for me to prefer my requests?"

"Yes."

"I will do so, at once."

CHAPTER II.

THE CONFESSION OF SINDAHR GOOSH.

"You understand, of course," Danton went on presently, "that, as Prince Edouard, I have very sumptuously appointed apartments, where I live?"

"Yes."

"I wish to secure from you the privilege of returning for three days, if possible, to my character—and imposition, if you choose to put it so—of the prince, in order to accomplish three things."

"What are the three?"

"One is, to dismantle my apartments, to restore to the proper persons the different articles that are there which are not my own, to pay up all my debts incurred

as the prince, and so to leave my record clean so far as that enterprising individual is concerned."

"Well; go on. What is the next one?"

"I wish to prepare Miss Vanderdyken for the separation that must ensue. I wish to have an opportunity to tell her myself that there must be no more thought of a marriage between us, and I want to do it in my own way, so that she will not be humiliated, so that she will suffer less, or possibly not at all, and, in short, to spare her all the pain possible."

"How will you do this?"

"I shall tell her that I have a wife living whom I have long supposed to be dead; that I have suddenly discovered the fact; that I have hastened to her to tell her the secret at once, having revealed it to no one else—and I will suggest to her that it shall be given out in a quiet way that I have proposed and she has rejected me."

The detective nodded and Danton continued:

"You see, Mr. Carter, things have gone so far and have become so intimate between Miss Vanderdyken and myself, that every one who knows us has determined that our marriage is a foregone conclusion. If society gets the idea that Marguerite has refused me, her pride will not be made to suffer at all, and she herself, so far as her possible love for me is concerned, will be less hurt, because she will believe that I have not wilfully deceived her, save in the one thing that I did not in the beginning tell her that I had been married before. But that part of it others will not know about."

"I understand you. What is the third particular you wish to arrange?"

"It exists in my desire to take leave of society itself in such a manner that my going may seem to be the result of Miss Vanderdyken's refusal to be my wife."

The detective nodded again.

"As the prince, I will have left a clean record behind me, Mr. Carter. Among all those people there will not be one whom will feel that he or she has been imposed upon. In that way I will spare the feelings of those who have been my friends and with whom I have been intimate; and that will further spare Marguerite. I think you will agree with me that, so far as it goes, the motives are praiseworthy."

"Yes."

"There is a fourth reason that I had nearly forgotten."

"Well?"

"There are at my apartments many letters, written by ladies and others, which I would desire to destroy. Some of them might be misconstrued, if the public should get hold of them."

"I quite understand you."

"Then, there is still another thing—connected with my return to prison and to justice."

"What is that?"

"I should wish heartily that you and the commissioner would permit me to make a full confession of my crimes as Sindahr Goosh. There would then be no necessity for looking up my record, and the world would never know, if you two gentlemen would not tell it, that Sindahr Goosh was really Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton."

"You believe, do you, that it would require three days to arrange these things properly?"

"At least that; yes, sir. Four would be better, but I think it could all be accomplished in three."

"Three would be all that I would consent to."

"Very well, make it three."

"I should insist upon sending one of my assistants with you, to your apartments, Danton."

"To watch me?"

"Yes."

"But he would be known as your assistant, and instantly suspicions would arise."

"No; on the contrary, it could be arranged in such a manner as to support your plan with Miss Vanderdyken."

"How so?"

"The assistant would be disguised. You could represent to her, if you chose to do so, that he was a guest or a relative who had brought the information to you, concerning your former relations. Not that I entirely approve of the deception, but out of consideration for Miss Vanderdyken's feelings, I think perhaps it is best."

"Then I think the plan a very good one. I have no objections to the assistant."

"There is also another condition that I must make, Danton."

"What is it, please?"

"You must tell me here and now who you really are. I must know who you are, where you were born, where your home is, if you have one—and, in short, all about you."

"That is a hard condition."

"Nevertheless, I must insist upon it."

There was a moment or two of serious hesitation on the part of Danton, and then he said:

"Very well. My real name is Danton. My father was an English army officer, stationed in India for

many years. He ran away with and married the daughter of a maharajah, of great power and wealth, and I was the fruit of that union. My mother was stolen away from her husband before I was born, and I grew to youth in the palace of the old maharajah, remaining there, and never doubting that I was a full-blooded Indian until I was eighteen years old. Then my mother died, and soon after her the old maharajah passed away.

"His son, who assumed his father's position and fortune, lost no time in informing me who and what I was, and turning me out as unclean, since I had white blood in my veins. I was given the equivalent of a thousand dollars, and told to begone; I was also told that if I ever returned I would never a second time leave the palace alive.

"One thing he did tell me, and that was the name of my father; but when I sought the general, which was his rank, I discovered that he had also been dead several years, and that there existed no record of my birth, or my existence. Indeed it is doubtful if he ever heard of it.

"I had received up to that time a splendid education. My mother had attended to that, and I had been supplied with every opportunity to improve my mind.

"Thrown upon my own resources, I at first earned a living in thoroughly legitimate ways; but my wits were ever keen, and it was not long before I began to use them. All that happened twelve years ago. I am thirty years old now."

"Well?"

"Ten years ago I fell in with a young Frenchman of my own age, who was the real Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton, although he was living at that time under an assumed name. He did it because his fortune had disappeared and he could not live as his rank entitled him to do; but he had all the papers to assert his title and rights by birth. He was naturally a recluse, a bookworm—the sort of man who would ultimately have become a hermit had he lived long enough. We became great friends. I really liked him, and he was fond of me.

"There was no resemblance between us save that he was dark, like myself; but two years ago when he died—I had gone to pay him a short visit and found him ill; he died while I was there—when he died I determined on the spot to become Prince Thiers-Danton and to go into the world as such. He had been out of it ten years, and had never been personally well known to anybody, save myself. He was absolutely without resources, so there was nothing for me to steal save his name and title, but I relied upon my wits to supply other things—and so I became the prince.

"In effect, it was Sindahr Goosh Danton who died and was buried; the prince, who had been known as Edouard Malet, lived on.

"There, sir, as succintly as I can relate it, you have the entire story of my life; and I beg you to believe its entire truth, bearing in mind the fact that I could have insisted to you that I was really the prince, that I had a right to the name and title, and you could never have proved the contrary. Do you believe me?"

"Yes."

"And now, Mr. Carter, am I to understand that you consent to my requests?"

"I think so."

"Then if you will summon your assistant, whom you desire to send with me——"

"There are a few questions that I wish to ask of you first, Danton."

"Yes?"

"Have you employed any of the wonderful hypnotic powers you possess, in your pursuit of the heiress of the Vanderdyken millions?"

"No; save only such as I make use of unintentionally. No more than I have used upon you in preferring my requests this morning."

"Where and how did you acquire that power?"

"In India, from my maternal grandfather, the maharajah."

"He taught you?"

"Yes; so much of it as I did not possess by inheritance from him. But really, Mr. Carter, it is not so wonderful as you would suppose."

"No? Why not?"

"I am really no more of a hypnotist than you are, without the crystal.* With it, after a little practise, you would become as expert a hypnotist as I. But no; I do not exactly mean that, either. I do mean, however, that with practise and the use and assistance of the crystal you could hypnotize others."

"What has the crystal to do with it?"

"It is the size, shape, and the manner in which the crystal is cut, rather than the mere crystal itself, that has to do with it."

"Explain further, if you please."

"The old maharajah had spent a lifetime in the study of it. He had many crystals in his possession that he had had cut, and the one in my possession was

*See No. 595 of NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "The Crystal Mystery."

the best of all. I brought it with me without asking his son's permission, when I came away."

"So I supposed. But that does not explain——"

"No. If you will liken the visual rays to rays of light, you will understand when I tell you that the crystal is cut so that the facets ultimately direct the visual rays of eyes that look into it, straight to the center or heart of the crystal. The effect is the same as to draw lines with angles and finally bring them together at a sharp point. Understand?"

"Yes."

"By that means the gaze of the subject is concentrated at one point which is as sharp as a needle, and, therefore, the instant that your eyes rest upon the crystal, supposing a practised hypnotist to be behind it, you became hypnotized."

"And the victim, or subject, will then implicitly obey suggestions that are made by the hypnotist?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER III.

PATSY'S AND CHICK'S ASSIGNMENTS.

The detective rang the bell for Joseph, and when he appeared, said to him:

"Ask Mr. Garvan to come to me at once, Joseph."

It was not long before Patsy appeared, and as soon as he was in the room, the detective, with some irony in his tones, presented him to Danton in formal introduction.

"Patsy," he said, "this is the man whom we know as Sindahr Goosh. He is also the same man who is known to New York Society as Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton. He is the hypnotic thief whom Chick and I arrested yesterday, after a hard chase through Twenty-eighth Street. Danton, this gentleman is my second assistant, Patrick Garvan."

Danton inclined his head in acknowledgment of the introduction, and Nick continued:

"Mr. Garvan will go with you, Danton, to carry out the plans as we have formulated them. If you have occasion to present him to anybody, you can make use of his true name, for it is not very generally known in the society where you will take him."

Danton bowed his head again, and the detective went on:

"You may make such representation concerning him as you please. I will make no suggestions concerning that part of it. For the rest, if you will excuse us now, and go, I will give him my further instructions regarding the matter in hand."

"When and where shall I see Mr. Garvan again?" asked Danton, rising.

"How soon does Prince Edouard expect to return to his apartments?" replied the detective, smiling.

"Within two hours."

"Very well, then. Mr. Garvan will arrive there about that time."

Nick went with the man to the door and then returned to Patsy.

"I suppose you caught onto the game, Patsy?" he asked, as he resumed his seat.

"Partly, I think. You might give me the particulars, however."

"Certainly. Goosh found bail this morning. I did not ask him where, or how, for the reason that it did not interest me. He came directly here and sent in his name. He had a proposition to make to which I listened. It is this:"

The detective then explained in detail all that had occurred between him and the half-Hindu, closing with the remark:

"I have thought it best, out of consideration for a young woman who has done no wrong and who has been vilely imposed upon, to consent to the arrangement; but I made the condition that you were to accompany him and watch him wherever he goes."

"I understand," replied Patsy, nodding.

"I don't know whether the fellow intends to give us all the slip, if that is possible, or if he means to play fair. My idea favors the former. But if he does try to get away, I want you to prevent it."

"I think I can do it."

"Of course you can do it."

"I should disguise myself, of course."

"Oh, I don't know about that. Just a little, perhaps. You do not personally know any of the crowd you will meet when you go with him. They will not associate you with the Garvan who is Nick Carter's assistant. However, you may do as you please about that."

"I am to be at his rooms in two hours, eh?"

"Yes; about that."

"All right."

"You need not interfere with anything he chooses to do. Remember that the court has freed him on bail and that, therefore, you have no power over him. That is, you cannot arrest him and return him to prison unless he commits another crime—which he is not likely to do."

"No."

"But you can follow him. If he attempts to go away, go with him. Don't lose him; and keep me informed all the time concerning him."

"Yes; I will do all that."

"Naturally there will be intervals of time when you cannot be with him. You cannot, for example, be present at the interview that takes place between him and Marguerite Vanderdyken. But you can be somewhere near at hand, ready to act if occasion requires."

"I understand the situation thoroughly, I think."

"He asked for four days in which to accomplish all that he wishes to do. I consented to three, so you will be absent and with him for that much time, at the least."

"Yes."

"I wish a report each morning—a written report from you—concerning him. You can write it each night before you retire. I think that is all."

"You regard him as rather a large proposition, don't you, chief?" asked Patsy.

"Yes; to tell you the truth, I do."

"Will you tell me in just what way you so regard him?"

"Patsy, the fellow is not only crafty; he is smart. They don't make them any smarter. And it is the sort of smartness that has behind it the keenest kind of intelligence. He has got brains and lots of them, and, moreover, he knows how to use them. It is my opinion that he has thought out some scheme that he wishes to play, and I believe that Marguerite Vanderdyken is the object of that scheme."

"Then that is really why you consented to the arrangement?"

"The thought had largely to do with my giving my consent."

Patsy nodded.

"You see," continued the detective, "if I had refused his proposition, he would have fixed upon some other method of carrying out whatever it is that he has decided to do, and we would have been without the advantage of being on the ground to watch him. By the present plan, you will not be far away at any of the time—and you may be sure that I will not be, either."

"As a matter of fact, I really stand in the position of becoming a sort of guard over the interests of Miss Vanderdyken; eh?" asked Patsy.

"Precisely that. You know how I always feel about young women when they are likely to be imposed upon."

"Certainly."

"Well, then; although Miss Vanderdyken is personally unknown to me save by sight, I want you to watch over her as if she were our dear friend. She is a fine young woman, I have always been led to believe. Danton covets the money she will inherit—although with his crimes staring him in the face, I confess that I do not see exactly how he can hope to gain it."

"Do you think he will jump his bail, chief?"

"I think if he has half a chance, and believes that he can get away and keep away, he will do it."

"How many witnesses are there against him, whose evidence would really convict him of his crimes, if he were brought to trial?" asked Patsy.

"Four besides myself—and Chick."

"Do you know who they are?"

"Certainly."

"Will you tell me about them?"

"Well, there is Professor Ball, whom he hypnotized at the corner of Eighteenth Street and Sixth Avenue, and robbed on Seventh Avenue, between Seventeenth and Eighteenth."

"Yes."

"There is Mrs. John Haldeen, whom he hypnotized in front of one of the show-windows of Macy's store, and robbed just around the corner. There is J. D. Prime, a pompous individual, whom he hypnotized in the corridor of the Waldorf and robbed on Madison Avenue, and there is Acton Oakes, hypnotized in the café of the Holland and robbed outside the house in the same manner as the others—and Chick and myself."

"They have all been found, have they?"

"Yes; and their property restored to them. They are only too anxious to tell all they know, and with my testimony and Chick's to add to theirs and relate just how the robberies occurred the man would be convicted without the jury leaving the box."

"I suppose that most of them are strangers in the city, are they not?"

"No; only one. The pompous individual of the Waldorf, whose name is Prime. He lives somewhere in Saratoga County, I believe."

"Acton and Ball and Mrs. Haldeen are residents of the city?"

"Yes."

"Wasn't there a confederate of Danton's arrested with him, chief?"

"Yes."

"Is he also out on bail?"

"I haven't a doubt of it. I did not ask Danton the question, because I didn't care. We have no evidence against him save that he was in the company of the thief. As a mater of fact, he is not known to be even an accessory after the fact, and, therefore, cannot be convicted of anything."

"What is his name? What name did he give to the magistrate?"

"Manan Dreehm—a queer name. He is an East Indian, all right. He comes from one of the northern countries of India."

"I don't suppose you found out any of the particulars about him, did you?"

"No; but why do you ask all these questions, Patsy?"

"Merely to be so thoroughly posted that I will understand all the moves he makes—or, at least, be able to make a good bluff at it."

"Well, I think you have got about all of it now."

"And I had better be going."

"Yes; I think so."

"I'd like to ask one more question about this evidence business, chief."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Would your evidence and Chick's alone be sufficient to convict the man?"

"Yes. I think so. I haven't a doubt of it."

"Would your evidence alone, or Chick's evidence alone, be sufficient to convict him?"

"No; I don't think it would."

"By the way, where are Prince Edouard's apartments? You did not tell me that."

Nick told him, and Patsy rose to go.

"I am to pose as his guest—as a sort of relation or friend, I suppose; eh?" he said.

"Yes. Take your instructions as to that from Danton—and don't forget to report to me as I have directed."

"I won't."

As soon as Patsy was gone, Nick called Chick to him, told him what had happened thus far in making the arrangements, and added:

"Chick, I want you to keep tabs on the house of the 'prince' from the outside—and at the same time sort of watch over Patsy. He doesn't half-realize what sort of a chap he is up against, and it may be that the plans of Sindahr Goosh contemplates violence to Patsy, at the consummation of them, particularly if Patsy should happen to get in his way."

"I think you are right about that, Nick."

"I don't want that fellow to give us the slip. He is meditating something, I know. I could see it in the gleam of his magic eyes and in his smile."

"I'll watch him."

"Do; and, in the meantime, I will look up that Manan Dreehm a little. I had not thought of doing it before now, but it occurs to me that it would not be at all a bad idea."

"Manan Dreehm, eh? That's a name that would do for a real Indian prince."

"So it would."

CHAPTER IV.

SOME STRANGE FATALITIES.

The detective at once sought the court where Danton had been admitted to bail, and found, as he had suspected, that Manan Dreehm had also been so favored.

The pedigree of the man, as taken by the clerk, showed that he was born in India—and that was practically all. When asked for his address in New York, he gave that of the house out of which Nick Carter had driven him and his confederate, in the chase after Goosh.

But, returning home a little later, he presently received a telephonic message from Chick to the effect that he had discovered that Manan Dreehm was no other than acting valet for "Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton," and was at that moment in the apartments of the prince, where Patsy and Danton were already installed.

"So," muttered the detective. "The plot thickens ever so little." But he resolved to take it easy for the balance of the day, at least, and really until the three days agreed upon between him and Danton had almost expired.

He thought it would be better to await developments, since he had started upon that conduct of the case.

The following morning he received the reports of his two assistants, and it is necessary that they should be given here.

Patsy's was as follows:

"There has really been nothing doing to-day save what seems to be a legitimate carrying out of the conditions agreed upon between you. Danton has busied himself in looking over and destroying a lot of letters and papers, the fragments of which he burned. In the afternoon at three o'clock, having previously telephoned, he went to the Vanderdyken house and called upon Marguerite. They were alone together in the

library from half-past three until five. I had been previously presented, of course—as an old-time friend. When they came out of the library it was easy to see that Miss Vanderdyken had been weeping, and that she was greatly troubled. But she put up a good front, for all that.

"Danton and I returned at once to his rooms, where he wrote several letters to tradesmen and tailors, and what not. He did not offer to show me the contents of the letters, but he permitted me to see the addresses. I forgot to say that he wrote one letter this morning, as soon as we got here, which he gave to Manan Dreehm to post, and which I did not see at all.

"That about covers everything that has happened to-day. It now looks as if he were bent only upon doing as he said he wished to do. He has said nothing to me about his interview with Marguerite, and I do not think he intends to do so. I have taken it for granted that Chick has already informed you that Manan Dreehm is Danton's valet."

Chick's report was as follows:

"Danton has not been away from his rooms to-day save to go to the Vanderdykens, where Pat accompanied him. That was about three; he returned soon after five and is now in his rooms. You gave no directions about keeping any sort of watch upon Dreehm, and hence I have not done so. I should report, however, that he went out, about an hour after Danton and Patsy were together in the house, and did not return till a few minutes ago—and it is now after eleven o'clock at night. I have no idea, of course, where he went, but it was doubtless on some errand for his master."

That was the information contained in the two reports, and Nick, after reading it, went to bed.

In the morning, after finishing his breakfast, he was looking over the columns of the *Herald* when he was startled by reading the following notice, which followed after the usual headlines:

"Mrs. Mary Fitzgerald Haldeen, who occupies apartments at the Calathumpian, in Madison Avenue, was instantly killed some time during the evening of yesterday, by leaping or falling from the window of the dining-room of her apartments to the roof of the building which adjoins the Calathumpian on the south side. The house on the roof of which she was killed is but four stories high, while her rooms were situated on the twelfth floor of the Calathumpian, so the fall or the jump was a considerable one. She was a widow with no children, and lived alone with a maid and two servants besides. These, as well as her many friends, scout the idea that the woman leaped from the window, and give the opinion that in leaning from it for some unknown purpose, she somehow lost her balance and fell. She was dressed for the street at the time, and had evidently just entered, or was about to go out. Her maid was absent at the time, and the two servants were in the rear of the apartment and know nothing about the incident."

"Mrs. Haldeen was one of my witnesses," mused the detective. "She was the woman who fell a victim to the hypnotist in front of Macy's store."

He sat a long time with knitted brow, thinking the incident over, but he could see nothing connected with it to suggest anything more than what appeared in the account in the paper, so he presently put it aside—and tried to forget it.

All that day the detective devoted to other things than the case in hand, for he considered that that was well provided for, since Patsy and Chick were both "on the job."

But he awaited with some eagerness the reports that would reach him that evening, and, as soon as they came, read them quickly.

Patsy's was:

"Danton and I went out together early this morning and made a round of tailor-shops and haberdashers and the like, paying bills. Everywhere he was well received, and seems to have won quite a place for himself in the esteem of those he knows in his character of the prince. We chatted upon indifferent subjects during this time, never once referring to the matter in hand. You would really have thought, could you have overheard our talk, that we bear the relations to each other as represented.

"At one o'clock we went to one of the clubs in which he is received, and had luncheon together, mixing freely with the men who were there, and in rather a pleasant manner. After it we made several calls upon society people—you will find a list of the names and places below—but there was nothing said of importance at any of these places, save that Danton informed one and all that he was soon to leave the city and might not return for two or three years, or even more.

"Twice, while he was making these statements, he was asked very pointedly how Miss Vanderdyken received the news of his intended departure; and in each case he replied by a shrug and a remark intended to give the impression that it was because of her that he was going away. Really, he seems to be carrying out to the letter his promises about the matter.

"We dined this evening at one of the clubs, and afterward visited three others. At each of them he took rather formal leave of many acquaintances, telling all that in a few days—he could not say exactly when—he would be leaving the city and might not return.

"To one man, whom we met at one of the clubs, he said plainly that Miss Vanderdyken had refused him, and he was going away on that account, but begged that the man would not reveal the secret. Then, after

we were alone again, he told me: 'That fellow is the gossip of several clubs. He is the one to spread the news. He will say that he has it on good authority, and all that. I think I have fixed that part of it all right.' We did not return here to the apartments till after midnight—to be exact, twelve-forty-five. Danton has retired, and after posting this in the box in the hall, I shall do the same."

Chick's report was merely a recapitulation of Patsy's with the inside information eliminated. He merely told to what places Danton had gone during the day, and the time of his arrival back home; but he added, at the end:

"I have not seen the valet to-day. He had not come out of the house at all at the time I was called away to follow Patsy and Danton. So far as I know, he is now (1 a. m.), inside the house and has not left it to-day, but, of course, he might have been out all day without my being any the wiser. I have an uneasy feeling about me that I should be watching him instead of Danton; but you know best."

The detective retired with considerable to think over, but soon fell asleep and so forgot all about the case.

In the morning, as on the previous day, he was startled by reading in the paper the following headline: "Acton Oakes, Chairman, Killed."

After that the article went on to state that Acton Oakes, who was an exceedingly popular man in his own set, had been run down and killed by an automobile when in the act of crossing Fifth Avenue above Thirty-fourth Street.

The article explained that Mr. Oakes was hurrying across the avenue when the car, which was moving rapidly, struck him, hurling him many feet, and so throwing him beneath the wheels of a second car that was traveling in the opposite direction.

It was not known which car had actually killed him, although the first one was plainly to be blamed for the accident.

The man who had been driving the car that first struck him disappeared at once, and no trace of him could be found. He left his car there in the middle of the street while the crowd was gathering around the victim—just abandoned it.

The car was afterward discovered to be a hired one, and, at the garage where it belonged, no information could be obtained regarding the man who had hired it. He was described as a man with sandy hair who gave the name of Michael Quinn, and had left a deposit of two hundred and fifty dollars, which had not been called for.

It is supposed that he was so rattled by the accident that he preferred to lose his two hundred and fifty, to the unpleasantness attached to what had occurred.

"This is most remarkable," mused the detective. "Here are two of the witnesses against Danton dead within a little more than twenty-four hours of each other. They are strange coincidents, to say the least.

"But, all the same," he mused further presently, "there does not appear to be anything in either of them that could possibly connect Danton with them. It seems absurd even to suppose so. Mrs. Haldeen fell or leaped from the window of one of her rooms, and Oakes was run down in the street by an automobile, hurled under another one, and so killed.

"There seems, however, to be a fatality following those witnesses, and I think after a little I will go and call upon Professor Ball and warn him to be careful."

It was noon when the detective rang the bell of the house where the professor lived, and he was informed that the scientist was at work in his laboratory and never permitted himself to be disturbed at such times.

If the detective would call again, at half-past five that evening, the professor would be glad to receive him.

Nick Carter did call at five that evening—a little before the time appointed—and was told that the professor had not come out of his laboratory at all since he was there the first time. Would the detective wait until half-past five? The professor had never been known to remain in his laboratory after that hour.

The detective would, and did, but the professor did not come out.

At six o'clock he had not come forth, and the footman who waited upon the door and had admitted Nick began to look anxious.

"Where is the laboratory located?" asked the detective, approaching him.

"On the top floor, sir," was the reply.

"Which room is it, front or rear?"

"At the rear, Mr. Carter."

"Then, if you will stand aside, I will go up to the room and call him. My business is urgent, and I cannot wait longer. I will take the responsibility upon my own shoulders."

CHAPTER V.

THE FATE OF PROFESSOR BALL.

The detective rapped loudly upon the door of the laboratory, but received no response.

After waiting a moment he rapped a second time, and when this summons proved to be no more fruitful than its predecessor, he turned to the footman, who had followed him to the top floor, and asked:

"Have you a key to this room?"

"No, sir. The professor never permitted the key to leave his own possession. I have never even seen the inside of the room."

Nick spent a few moments in examining the lock, and discovered that it was so complicated that he could not hope to pick it.

Then he sent for some tools which the footman said were in the house, and set himself to work to force his way into the room, having previously called aloud many times to the professor and receiving no reply.

It did not take him long to remove the barrier. He did it by taking away the casing at one side of the door. Then he threw it open and entered.

It impressed him as strange that he was not surprised at what he saw.

He had expected to find the professor there, dead, on the floor of his laboratory, and in this he was not disappointed.

The man was stretched upon his back across the middle of the floor, a few feet back from the bench at which he had evidently been working.

Shattered glass was everywhere around the man, and in his tightly clenched fingers he still grasped the lower half and the base of a large graduate which had evidently held the fluid with which the professor had been occupied.

The face of the dead man was terribly burned and stained with acid, and there were blotches of the same stain on the bare floor around him—in fact, there were many evidences that there had been a terrible explosion in that room, for the scientist's garments were badly torn, and there were many other evidences of what had undoubtedly happened.

"What family had the professor?" asked the detective, of the footman.

"None at all, sir."

"How many servants?"

"Three besides myself, sir."

"Had he any relatives in the city?"

"No, sir. His relatives reside in England."

"Friends, then; do you know the names and addresses of any of his intimate friends?"

"Yes, sir; several of them."

"Near here?"

"Two of them."

"Then I will ask you to go at once to the one who is nearest, after you have informed the other servants about the matter, and tell him what has happened here. Ask him to come here as soon as he can make it convenient, but tell him to notify the coroner's office, and to bring a physician with him. Can you attend to all that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go at once. I will remain here until you return with the gentleman. What is the name of the man, by the way, whom you intend to bring here?"

"I thought I would summon Mr. Joshua Morgan, sir."

"Very good. Now go, and attend to all I have told you."

As soon as the detective was alone he turned his attention not so much to the body of the man as to the interior of the room in which he had been killed.

It was a large room, all of twenty feet square. There were three windows overlooking the yards in the rear of the house, and there were two doors, one of which had been nailed fast by placing a board across it.

In fact, the room had been made larger by removing a partition that had formerly divided it into two rooms, one of which had been what is known in the city as a hall room.

The three windows were tightly closed, and were evidently always kept in that condition, ventilation being obtained through an immense skylight which could be raised and lowered at the will of the owner of the place. This skylight was now open.

It was also supplied with many curtains, so that the light could be graduated as it pleased the fancy of the occupant of the room. The windows at the front were the same.

A wide bench ran the entire length of the room on a level with the sills of the windows and along them. A shorter bench extended from the west side of the room to the casing of the door through which the detective had entered.

The other spaces along the walls were occupied by shelves, and these were littered with bottles of many sizes, graduates, crucibles, retorts, glass tubes, and, in short, with all the various paraphernalia of a man who is occupied in the pursuits that interested the professor.

The two benches were littered with the same sort of impedimenta.

Many of the bottles and other things in the room had been shattered by the explosion that had killed the man, and acids and liquids of all sorts had run

hither and thither about the place, staining the rugless floor in many colors.

Havoc that seemed entirely out of proportion with the conditions had been wrought, and the detective gazed upon the scene in consternation.

Nick wondered if the professor had been engaged in the discovery of some new explosive, which had gone off accidentally, for he could account for the situation in no other way.

He examined the body again, and discovered that in addition to what he had noticed in the first place, it was covered with bruises and abrasions.

The coat had been almost entirely blown away. The waistcoat was torn to ribbons. The shirt was in strips and covered with blood. One of the trousers legs was almost torn off.

On the head, above the right temple, was a terrible bruise, and it looked as if the skull beneath it had been fractured, as indeed proved to be the case.

Nick examined the half of the graduate that was still retained in the hand of the dead man, and saw that it still contained the sediment of a liquid; then he gave some attention to the broken glass around the body.

But of this there were all sorts, and he did not find it interesting.

Presently he left the room and sought the way to the roofs which he presently found by means of a scuttle, which was locked, or, rather, bolted on the under side; but he sprung it and went out, approaching the skylight above the laboratory when he had done so.

Near it, on the roof outside, he discovered some particles of broken glass which had doubtless been hurled there by the force of the explosion.

The skylight had been made in the shape of an inverted V and raised from either side toward the center. Both these sides were open, at about right angles with the highest point, or, rather, on a level with it.

The detective presently returned to the laboratory, and, as he did so, heard approaching up the stairs the footsteps of his expected company.

Mr. Morgan came hastily into the room, but stopped just across the threshold and stared in horror at what he saw before him.

"It is terrible," he was heard to murmur. "I always told Ball that this was exactly what would happen one of these days. Poor old chap."

The physician, who came with Mr. Morgan, stepped forward and gave a moment to an examination of the body without touching it, and then, turning to Nick, he said:

"He has been dead three hours or more, Mr. Carter. I think I will not disturb the body until the arrival of the coroner."

"No; that will be better. You notified the coroner, did you?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Morgan?" said the detective, then.

The man started out of his reverie, and responded: "Yes, Mr. Carter."

"You were an intimate friend of the dead man?"

"The most intimate associate he had, I believe," was the reply.

"Do you happen to know if he had been experimenting with explosives?"

"Oh, yes; that was always his hobby."

"Did he ever express himself to you as being in fear of something of this sort?"

"Never. Quite the contrary. He was a man of great caution. I often expostulated with him because of the risks he ran, but he invariably replied:

" 'Nonsense, Morgan. I never lose my caution. I have never lost it. I am never careless, and I never mix things that I have any reason to fear will explode.' But that is evidently the very thing that he has done."

"It looks like it. Did you see the professor to speak with him, to-day?"

"Yes; quite early this morning."

"Did he mention what he was intending to do to-day?"

"No; he never talked about what he was engaged upon, unless I questioned him about it; and then it annoyed him."

"He was in his usual spirits this morning, I suppose?"

"Yes. I think so. He had been annoyed by the receipt of a letter, however."

"Did he tell you about it?"

"Yes; that is, partly."

"You tell me about it, please."

"Why, some savant from abroad was in the country; had heard of the professor, and wished to make his acquaintance. He had written to that effect. In the letter he had written that he would call upon the professor at eleven o'clock, and Ball was annoyed about it.

" 'I don't even know the man's name,' he said one. 'Never heard of him, and I can't spend my time with

people like that. What would you do, Morgan?' he asked me.

"'Turn him down,' I suggested; and he replied:

"'By thunder, I will.'"

The detective turned toward the spot where the footman had been standing, but he had disappeared.

"I don't suppose you know whether the man called or not?" he asked of Mr. Morgan.

"No. I have no idea."

"Do you remember the name?"

"No; I do not."

"I called here myself at noon, and was told by the footman that the professor never permitted himself to be disturbed when he was at work in his laboratory."

"That was quite correct. He would not see even me at such times, no matter how urgently I might have made the request. If a servant so far forgot himself as to rap at his door when he was at work, it was a signal for that servant's discharge."

"Then we are to suppose that if the man did call at eleven, he was sent away as I was, at noon."

"There could be no doubt about that."

Other footsteps were heard ascending the stairs at that moment, and presently the coroner appeared to view the body, and grant permission for it to be moved.

"An accident," he said at once. "I was slightly acquainted with Professor Ball, Carter, and I am not at all surprised that this has happened. My! but it was a severe explosion, was it not?"

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERY OF THREE CASES.

"Coroner," said the detective presently, "if I might make a suggestion——"

"Certainly."

"It is that you remove the body into the front room on this floor, and there give it a thorough examination. While you are attending to that, with the assistance of the doctor who is here with us, I will go below and have some more talk with the footman. But I shall wish to see you again before you leave the house."

"All right."

Nick found the footman at his post in the front hall, and he heard the scurrying feet of the other servants as they started away when they heard him approaching.

"What time this morning did the professor enter his laboratory?" Nick asked of the footman.

"I should say, sir, that it was at or very near eight o'clock."

"Have you seen him since that time? Since he went to the laboratory?"

"No, sir."

"He did not come down-stairs to his luncheon, then?"

"No; he never did that when he was working in the laboratory. One of his favorite remarks was that a clear head and a full stomach never went together. He never ate in the middle of the day, if he was busy in his laboratory."

"Did any one call here to see him this morning? Any one besides myself?"

"Yes, sir. A man called at about eleven o'clock."

"Did he enter the house?"

"No, sir."

"The professor had already given you instructions about him?"

"Yes; he had told me that such a person would call, and I was to say that he was out of town. 'It's a lie, Andy,' he said, 'but it's excusable. He is one of those bores who think they know something about science, and if he thinks I am in town he will pester me to death.' So I did as I was told."

"Did he intimate that he would call again?"

"No, sir."

"What was his name?"

"I do not know, sir. It was not told to me. I did not hear it."

"What sort of looking man was he?"

"I think he was a Frenchman, sir; he looked it. He wore a mustache and goatee and a silk hat with a straight brim; also a long frock coat, unlike anything I have seen since the professor took me to Paris with him three years ago."

"He was dark?"

"Yes."

"Speak with an accent?"

"Decidedly. He asked me in the first place: 'Is ze professair at home, garçon?'"

"Was there any other caller during the day except myself?"

"No, sir."

"Were you away from your post at any time to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Did you not hear the noise of the explosion that killed your employer?"

"Yes, sir, I believe now that I did, although I thought nothing of it at the time."

"How was that?"

"Well, I heard a noise that seemed to shake the house, but over on the next block they are excavating for a building and have been doing a great deal of blasting of rock. I remember that I attributed the noise I heard to that."

"Quite natural. What time was it?"

"I should say a little before two, sir, although I do not recall it exactly."

"It did not occur to you that it was a noise in the professor's room, and that an explosion had occurred there?"

"Not at all."

"I suppose you never went near his door when he was at work there; eh?"

"Never, sir. I have been in his employ seven years, and he would have discharged me on the spot had I ventured to do such a thing."

"Who gives the mail to the professor after it is delivered at the door by the postman?"

"I have always done so."

"He received some letters this morning?"

"Yes; several."

"Do you know where they are now?"

"In the library; yes, sir."

"Bring them to me. I wish to look at them."

They were brought quickly, but the one in which the request of the visiting savant was made was missing.

"There is one letter, received by him this morning, that is not here, Andy," said the detective.

"Probably that is the one that he took out with him," was the reply.

"Did he go out this morning?"

"Only to intercept Mr. Morgan, who was passing. He put on his hat and went out and down the steps with a letter in his hand. Then he stood for some time talking to Mr. Morgan, and then they walked on together toward the corner. The professor was gone only a short time, not more than ten minutes at the most, and he returned without the letter in his hand."

"Did he say anything to you when he reentered the house?"

"It was then when he gave me the order about not admitting the man who would call at eleven."

"Andy, did you ever hear the professor express any fears that some day his experiments might result in an accident that would kill him?"

"No, sir. He never had any such fear at all. I know that to be true. He was a very careful man, Mr. Carter."

"That will do for the present. I think you may look to Mr. Morgan for your orders now. He will take charge of the professor's affairs and adjust them."

The detective returned to the top floor, where the coroner and the doctor had just completed their examination of the body.

"Well, what do you find?" asked the detective.

"I find that it was a terrific explosion," replied the coroner. "In its effect it was very much like nitroglycerin. The flesh of the body is badly torn in several places; some bones are broken; particles of glass have been driven through the clothing into the flesh. The professor was instantly killed. There is no doubt of that."

"When do you suppose it must have occurred?"

"The doctor and I agree that it happened about two o'clock, or a little before that."

"I suppose you have discovered nothing to indicate that it was not entirely an accident, have you?"

"Nothing at all. You don't think it could have been anything else, do you, Carter?"

"No; I don't think so."

"It had to be either that or suicide, didn't it?"

"I suppose so."

The detective left the house of the professor soon after that, and walked slowly homeward, it being then nearly half-past eight in the evening.

He was very deeply impressed by what had happened—by the strange list of fatalities that had pursued those who could testify against the hypnotic thief.

First, Mrs. Haldeen had leaped, or fallen—or had been thrown bodily—from a window of her apartment to a roof seventy feet below it, and had been killed.

Second, Acton Oakes had been run down in the streets of the city, and was killed; and it might well have been an accident—was not thought to be anything else by any one save the detective—although a strange feature of the case was the disappearance of the driver of the car that had accomplished it.

Third, the fate of the professor.

True, he worked in a private laboratory and was an inventor of explosives, but he had done the same things the greater part of his life, was always cautious, had never expressed any aprehension on the subject.

"If these things are not accidents," he muttered to himself, "then all I have to say is that they make up the most devilish list of *coincidences* I ever heard about.

Feeling restless and uneasy, he at last rose, and, donning his hat, went out.

His walk after that took him in the direction of the apartment-house where Danton had his rooms, and it suddenly occurred to him that he would see Chick and tell him about it.

He strolled on until he arrived in front of the house and began to look around for Chick, although he quickly discovered that the first assistant was nowhere to be seen.

Then it occurred to him that Danton might be out, and, if such was the case, Chick would, of course, have trailed him; but to assure himself of the truth or untruth of this idea, he entered the house and went to the elevator.

"The rooms of Prince Thiers-Danton," he said to the man in the elevator.

"The prince is not at home, sir. He went out shortly after seven and has not returned."

"Was any one with him?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir. The gentleman who is visiting him."

"Is there any one in the prince's rooms now, do you know?"

"His servant may be there, sir. I do not know."

"Take me there and I will find out."

He was left at the floor where the rooms were situated and directed toward the door; but, although he rang several times, he brought forth no response.

"Evidently there is no one at home," he mused to himself. "I think I will go inside, anyhow. It would not distress me particularly if Danton should return and find me there, under all the circumstances."

He brought his magic picklock into play and presently had the door open. Then he passed inside and closed it after him.

He found himself in a private hallway, and, passing through this, he entered the parlor of the suite.

It was furnished luxuriantly. As yet there was no sign of dismantling it, although the time allotted to Danton to accomplish all that he had set out to do would expire at noon of the day following.

Nick began a careful inspection of the place, but, although he was very thorough, both in that room and in the sleeping-room of the "prince," he found nothing whatever of interest.

There was not a letter or a paper or a thing to offer any suggestion to him, although he could not have told what he was searching for, if he had tried.

It was an investigation made on general principles, that was all.

At last he desisted, and, standing in the middle of the floor, thought for a moment.

Then he passed through the apartment again and sought and found the room where Manan Dreehm slept.

It had occurred to him that possibly he might discover something here.

But the room was severely bare. The floor had no carpet or rug. There was one chair and a washstand which contained nothing. The bed was a single one of iron, and severely simple.

CHAPTER VII.

A COOL AND DANGEROUS SCOUNDREL.

Nick had returned to the front room—the parlor of the suite—and had seated himself in a comfortable chair near the window where he could look out over the electrically lighted streets and housetops of the city when he heard the clanging of the iron door at the elevator-shaft, and this was followed by a quick though quiet tread in the hall.

Then a key grated in the lock of the door, it opened, and there entered—Manan.

The detective had turned off the lights before seating himself in that obscure corner of the room, so it was in darkness, and the corner he occupied was darker possibly than other portions of it.

Manan, at least, did not discover him, but he crossed the room and thrust his face close to the clock on the mantel, which told him, as Nick was aware it would do, that the hands were pointing to almost the hour of eleven.

The man did not mutter or talk to himself, however.

After looking at the clock he remained there, near the mantel, for a considerable time, in silence and as motionless as a statue.

Then he passed through the hallway and entered the bathroom of the apartment, and Nick could hear him engaged in washing his hands while the light that he had turned on shone out through a crack between the door and the casing.

Presently that disappeared, and Manan came out again, this time turning toward his own room, which he entered.

He was there but a moment, however, when he came out again and approached the front room where the detective was seated, switching on the electric

lights as he advanced—and Nick knew that the moment had come when his own presence there would be discovered.

But he did not care for that. In fact, it was as he wished it to be.

Having switched on the lights in the parlor, Manan advanced, and discovered Nick Carter; nor did he display the slightest surprise when he made the discovery.

So perfect was his self-control that Nick wondered if the man had not been aware of his presence all the time; but he finally determined that he had not.

He stopped in his tracks and stood there, staring at the detective for a full minute; then his lips parted in a smile, and he said:

"Good evening, sir. I was not aware that this room was occupied."

"No?" replied the detective. "Where is your master? I am waiting for him."

"I do not know where he is, sir. He was going out at seven or half-past and did not expect to return till late."

"Then you were not here when he went out?"

"No, sir."

"Where were you?"

"I was engaged in the execution of some directions he had given me, sir."

"What were those directions?"

"I have no doubt that Prince Thiers-Danton would inform you if you should ask him, sir," was the apparently humble and yet impertinent reply.

"Where have you been to-night, Manan?" demanded the detective sternly.

"To the theater, sir; to what you call a vaudeville show. See?"

He came a step nearer to the detective and extended his hand, holding in the palm of it a coupon that plainly had been torn from a theater ticket.

Nick took it, glanced at it, saw that it was the coupon for a seat at one of the theaters for that same night, and dropped it on the floor, whereupon Manan quietly picked it up and returned it to his pocket.

The act did not impress the detective at the time, although later he recalled it.

"Will you tell me who admitted you, sir?" asked Manan, who was evidently greatly puzzled to find the detective there at all.

"Certainly. I admitted myself."

"I regret that his highness the prince is not present."

"No doubt. But he is likely to be present before very long, don't you think?"

"It is impossible to tell, sir. It depends upon where he passed the evening. He may return at any moment, and again, he may not arrive until daylight. It is his last evening as the prince, sir, as you know. I think he intended to make the most of it."

"In what way."

"I cannot say, sir."

"Mr. Garvan is with him, I suppose?"

"I cannot say. They were to go out together. Can I serve you with some sort of refreshment, sir?"

"No, Manan, you are not what you pretend to be. You are not naturally a servant. You were born and educated to something higher than that."

"It is quite true, sir."

"Then why do you play the part now?"

"It is a case of necessity, sir."

"I don't think I quite believe you there, Manan."

"That is, of course, as Mr. Carter pleases."

"You are altogether too smooth."

Manan bowed his head and smiled, but made no audible reply.

"You and Danton are a pair of exceedingly clever rascals, Manan; clever thieves—and I have begun to think that you are more; murderers, as well."

He watched the man closely as he uttered that word, but there was no sign that Manan heard it at all, or, if he did, cared for it. He smiled and bowed again.

"You are not flattering in your remarks, sir," he said.

"Possibly not. Where were you at two o'clock this afternoon?"

Manan appeared to think deeply for a moment. Then he replied:

"I do not remember, sir. I am a poor accountant of time."

"I saw you studying it very carefully a few moments ago."

"That was in order that I might tell my master of the time of my return," was the glib reply.

"You think he will wish to know?"

"He always asks me what time I returned, when he knows that I have been out?"

"Ah! He knew that you were going out to-night, did he?"

"To the theater, yes, sir. He gave me the ticket himself."

"Does he often do that sort of thing, Manan?"

"Frequently—almost invariably, when he knows that there is nothing for me to do."

"I suppose he had in mind, also, the fact that you will soon both be behind prison-bars."

"Very likely, sir."

"Are you aware of the fact that one of the witnesses against you is dead?"

"Two, sir."

"It would be strange if another were carried off in the same manner, would it not?"

"It would, sir."

"That would leave only one to send you and your master——"

"You are forgetting, sir. Not one of these witnesses had, or have, anything to testify against me. It is against the prince that they would testify."

"To be sure."

"I don't think I would receive much of a sentence in any case. A few months, perhaps."

"But with Danton it is different, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your right name, Manan?"

"Manan Dreehm, sir."

The detective realized that this servant was armed at every point, and that nothing could possibly be obtained from him by the process of pumping; so at that point he left his chair and started toward the door.

"I will not wait any longer," he said. "When Danton returns you may tell him that I was here and that I shall expect to see him at my house at noon tomorrow. You may tell Mr. Garvan the same thing."

"I will do so, sir."

Nick turned his back and stepped quickly toward the door, but he thought he heard a movement behind him and he wheeled in his tracks.

But Manan was evidently standing exactly as he saw him last. He did not appear to have moved a muscle, although there was a lurking smile around the corners of his mouth, and a strange and vivid gleam in his eyes.

The detective passed out without uttering another word, and closed the door behind him, but when he reached the front steps of the house, he encountered there, directly under the light that shone in the vestibule, Danton and Patsy returning.

Danton betrayed no surprise because of the meeting, although Patsy did so.

"I have been waiting in your rooms for you," said Nick, stopping in front of them, for he supposed Chick to be watching somewhere, and he wished his first assistant to discover him and wait for him.

"I regret that you did not wait a few minutes longer," was Danton's courteous reply. "If you will return——"

"No, thank you. Not to-night. Will you tell me where you have been?"

"I have been making the last few calls that I deemed necessary, under the arrangement."

"The affair, so far as Miss Vanderdyken is concerned, is closed?"

"Entirely. I attended to that the first day, as Mr. Garvan will inform you."

"And to-night, has he been with you?"

"Yes. Is it not so, Mr. Garvan?"

"Quite so. I have not lost sight of him since I came here, chief," replied Patsy. "That is not, of course, literally true; but in effect it is."

The detective turned again toward Danton.

"Are you reminded of the fact that the contract expires at noon, to-morrow?" he asked.

"Perfectly."

"I have left word with Manan Dreehm for you to come to my house at noon to-morrow, Danton."

"Very well. As you please."

"You seem to permit your servant a great deal of liberty, Danton," said Nick meaningly.

"Don't you think it quite proper under the circumstances, Mr. Carter? He is likely soon to be confined in jail—for I haven't a doubt that he will get at least thirty days for the part he played in my errors."

"How much do you expect to get, yourself, Danton?"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Who could answer that?" he replied. "No one but the judge on the bench, and even he could not do it until he has listened to the testimony."

"Ah, yes. And that reminds me. It is a curious thing that two of the witnesses against you should have met with violent deaths within the last three days. Don't you think so?"

"Three, Mr. Carter; three."

"Three!" Nick pretended to be astonished.

"Yes"—coolly—"the notice of the death of another is in the ten-o'clock *Telegram*, for to-night. Professor Ball has blown himself up with some of his high explosives. But I think you should have known about it, since this paper tells us that you were there;" and he produced the paper he had referred to. Then he added: "And, as you say, it is a strange and a curious thing. It would seem almost as if fate were aiding me; don't you think so?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FOURTH WITNESS.

Nick Carter nodded a "good night" to Patsy, and, without so much as glancing at Danton again, ran down the steps to the street and turned away toward his own home.

But he was alertly on the watch for Chick, who, he felt confident was not far distant, had seen him, and was waiting for him to come out in order to make the nightly report in person.

Still, the detective walked as far as the next corner without seeing a sign of his first assistant; and there he stopped and waited, believing confidently that Chick would appear in a few minutes.

According to the plan he had been following, Chick should have been rather closely behind Danton and Patsy when they returned to the house after the evening out.

But, although Nick waited there on the corner a long time, there was no sign of Chick whatever, nor had he appeared after half an hour of waiting.

At the end of that time the detective went on homeward, greatly puzzled.

It was not at all like Chick to have neglected his evening's work, or to have done it in a slipshod manner. Nick confessed to himself that he in no wise understood the situation.

He half-hoped, although did not really expect, that he would find Chick at the house awaiting him; but it was not so, and he sat down to wait still longer.

After another hour, however, he retired, but not to sleep, for the case was strangely on his mind, and he felt a vague uneasiness concerning Chick from which he could not divorce his mind.

In the morning, having slept not at all, he descended to the breakfast-table, hoping that he would find Chick's report as usual; but it was not there, and Nick found himself staring into his plate on the table before him, wondering what could have happened.

For he recognized now that the situation was indeed serious.

The fatalities that had so far pursued those who could testify against Danton, while appearing in each case to have been wholly the result of accident, could not really have been so. He realized that fact only too well.

There was a devilish ingenuity working behind it all; a degree of craft that was almost phenomenal, since it had brought about these events so mysteriously, so fatally, and yet so vitally in the interests of the man or men who were concerned in the hypnotic robberies.*

And now Chick had disappeared.

His testimony was as vital, or more so, as that of any of the others. It was needed to support the assertions that would be made by Nick Carter; in fact, their testimony fitted together after the manner in which two boards are dovetailed together; one was not complete without the other.

Suddenly the detective bounded to his feet.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed aloud, so that Adelina, Patsy's wife, who was seated opposite him at the coffee-urn, stared in surprise.

"What is it?" she asked, smiling toward him.

"I was thinking about the fourth witness," he replied. Adelina was conversant with the case, and understood that he referred to that pompous individual, J. D. Prime, who was the last one left now of the four victims who could give conclusive testimony against Danton.

"What about him?" asked Adelina.

"Why, this: If I have got any brains at all in this head of mine, Prime is either already dead, or he stands in momentary danger of his life. That's all."

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"Certainly I do. Why shouldn't I think so? It is plain to me that Mrs. Haldeen was pushed or thrown from the window of her apartment at the Calathumpian; that Acton Oakes was purposely run down and killed with an automobile, and that Professor Ball was killed by having a bottle of nitroglycerin dropped upon him from the open skylight over his head; and now Chick has disappeared."

"And Patsy!" cried Adelina, starting to her feet.

"Patsy is the only one of the crowd who stands in no danger," replied Nick. "He has no testimony to give. Patsy is all right."

Adelina resumed her seat with a sigh of relief, but Nick was already half-way to the door.

"Where are you going?" she asked him.

"To find out what has become of the man Prime," was the reply.

"And Chick——" she asked.

"There is nothing that I can do about Chick—for the present. My first duty at the present moment is toward Prime."

The detective hurried from the house and to the hotel—to find that Mr. J. D. Prime had taken his departure for his home in Saratoga County at seven

*See No. 595.

o'clock the preceding evening, and was presumably there.

"Do you know his address?" asked the detective.

"Yes. He left it for letters to be forwarded. He also said that he should be back here again in a short time, because he expected to be summoned to give some sort of testimony before the grand jury."

"Yes. I know about that. Give me his address, if you please."

It was supplied, and Nick hurried to the telegraph-desk and wired to J. D. Prime's home, asking in the message if he had arrived there and calling for an immediate reply.

"I should hear from that message within a couple of hours," he told the operator. "When the reply comes you may hold it here for me. I will call for it."

He went out then to make further inquiries about Chick, but at the end of two hours he returned to the hotel having discovered nothing, and to find there this message:

"Mr. Prime was expected home last evening, but has not arrived. Probably detained in New York."

"Yes," mused the detective. "Detained in New York. That is about the size of it; but, oh, how much it means. J. D. Prime is dead. I am as sure of it as if I were looking upon his corpse. Good Heaven! what a terrible condition of affairs!"

He returned to the hotel desk.

"Do you know what train Mr. Prime was to take last night?" he asked of the same clerk with whom he had talked before.

"The seven-thirty-two."

"What baggage did he have, if any?"

"A small steamer trunk and a leather satchel, of the Gladstone pattern."

"Then he must have left the hotel in a cab, or a coupé."

"Yes, he did. The carriage clerk can tell you about that."

"Oh, yes," said the carriage clerk a moment later in reply to a question from the detective, "I remember Mr. Prime very well. He left here last evening about seven, for the Grand Central Station."

"Do you think you could identify the trunk he had with him?"

"I know only that it was a small steamer trunk, and that it had his name on either end of it. It was a leather trunk, too."

"Is the driver here who took him to the station?"

"I think so. Yes."

"Don't call him. Take me out to him. I wish to ask him some questions."

To the driver of the cab that had taken Mr. Prime to the station, he put the following questions a moment later:

"You took Mr. Prime to the Grand Central Station last night. I want to know if he purchased his ticket and had his trunk checked before you came away?"

"Yes; I attended to the checking of the trunk myself. When we arrived at the station, he told me to wait till he purchased his ticket and then to drive around to the baggage department. I did so, and I attended to the checking of the trunk."

"How long was that before the time for his train to go? Do you know that?"

"Yes; because he looked at his watch after I handed him the check, and said to me:

"'We are still in good time, Timothy. I have fifteen minutes to spare.' Then he gave me an extra dollar and bade me good night."

"That, of course, was the last you saw of him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he carry his bag into the station himself?"

"No, sir. One of the red-capped porters took it."

"Would you know that porter again?"

"Yes, indeed. I know him very well. Whenever I go to the station with a passenger, if Mike—that's his name—is in sight, I always motion to him and give him the chance for a tip."

"Drive me up there as quickly as possible, and find Mike for me."

This was soon accomplished, and Mike, the porter, was within hailing-distance when they arrived. It was cabby who did the first part of the questioning now.

"Mike," he said, "do you remember the fare I brought here for the seven-thirty-two last night? The big party who looked as if he owned the earth?"

"Sure."

"This gentleman wishes to ask you some questions about him, Mike."

"Yes, sir," said the porter, turning toward Nick.

"Tell me all that you know about the gentleman, from the moment you received his bag in your hand until you put him on the train—if you did put him on the train at all," said the detective.

"That is just the strange part of it, sir," replied the porter. "I didn't put him on the train at all. He didn't get on the train. His bag is even now in Mendell's parcel-room. I left it there myself, and I have the check for it. I reported the matter to the police-

man who stands at the ticket-office, and I suppose he reported it at the station-house; and I was waiting to see Timothy to tell him——"

"Never mind all that. Tell me how it happened that he did not take the train he intended to leave on."

"I don't know how, sir; it happened, though."

"Well, what did happen?"

"We were standing out on the concourse. The gentleman was smoking, you know."

"Well?"

"A messenger-boy came along presently, and he was calling out to beat the band: 'Mr. Prime, Mr. J. D. Prime!' and the gentleman called him and took the letter he had in his hand. He opened it and read it. Then he turned to me.

"'There is another train at eight-thirty-five,' he said. 'I will take that one. I want you to take charge of that bag and meet me right here with it ten minutes before time for that train. I will make it worth your while.'

"He didn't say another word, but turned and hurried away toward the Vandervilt Avenue entrance; and that, sir, is the last I saw of him. But I've got something more that may be of service to you, sir."

"What was it?"

"The note that the boy brought to him. He dropped it and I picked it up. Here it is."

He had taken a folded paper from his pocket, and now he extended it toward the detective.

And Nick received it and read:

"DEAR MR. PRIME: I was told at your hotel that you had started for a train, and for home. It is necessary that I should see and speak with you a moment before your departure, but I cannot leave here to go after you in person. Will you come at once, please, to the saloon on the corner, just below the station? I will not detain you long.

"Cordially yours, NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER IX.

SOME SWIFT DETECTIVE WORK.

The detective gazed upon the letter in amazement; then he placed it in his pocket.

The plotters had not hesitated to use the name of Nick Carter, in order to carry out their designs. No forgery had been attempted, however. It had doubtless been supposed that Mr. Prime was not familiar with the handwriting of Nick Carter.

"I watched for him at every train until the last one for the night had gone," said the porter, "and lost my sleep doing it. Then I got here early this morning, and have been watching ever since. But I haven't seen him."

"All right," replied Nick absently, for he was thinking. "Here is a fee that will make you feel all right about that. Now give me Mendell's check for the bag."

"But what shall I do if the gentleman comes here for it?"

"Tell him that Nick Carter has it. That is all."

"Are you the gentleman who wrote the note, sir?"

"I am the one who was supposed to have written it. I presume 'the saloon on the corner below the station' must refer to Brandes' place. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, sir; and I went down there to make inquiries; and I described the gentleman as well as I could; but nobody remembered to have seen him."

The detective went outside the station and paused where the cabmen line the edge of the sidewalk—and they grouped themselves around him eagerly, thinking he was in search of a conveyance.

"Boys," he said, "I don't want a hack, or a cab, but I do want some information. I'll put up a five-dollar bill to treat you all, if you will help me to obtain it."

"We're on, mister," said one of them, stepping forward. "What is it you wish to know?"

"This: Last night at about seven-twenty, or between that and seven-thirty, a gentleman came out of the station and started down the street toward Brandes'. He had not arrived there, I think, when he was either overtaken or stopped on the street by another man who must have induced him to enter a cab and drive somewhere. The gentleman was large and portly, and had the appearance and manner of a man of wealth. He wore a silk hat, diamonds, and his hair and side-whiskers were very white. I want to find the driver whose cab he entered. If it was not one of you, stir around and find out who it was. Ask all the drivers around here. I'll wait right here where I am till you report. It may interest you to know that I am Nick Carter."

"Gosh!" exclaimed one; and then they all scurried away like so many rabbits.

The detective waited something less than ten minutes before the last of them returned; and then one of them brought another driver with him who had

not been present when the detective gave his instruction.

"I remember the party very well, Mr. Carter," said this one, stepping forward at once. "He was with a red-headed man who looked like an Irishman, although his eyes and his skin were both rather dark for the Irish. I drove them away."

"All right. Here, boys. Here is the bill I promised you. It is for all of you. Now, my man, that red-headed chap is one whom I wish to see, also. Tell me where you took them."

"To the middle of the block between Forty-first and Forty-second Streets, west side, on Second Avenue, sir. No farther."

"And left them there?"

"Yes."

"Did you see them enter a house, or a doorway?"

"No, sir. They stood together near the curb until I had driven away. I do not know where they went from there."

"Did you overhear any conversation between them?"

"Only one remark, when they were getting into the cab."

"What was that?"

"The red-headed man said to the other one: 'Mr. Carter is waiting for you, and it is important that he should see you. I can easily get you back here for the next train.'"

"That is all you heard?"

"Yes."

"And you have now told me all you know about the matter?"

"Everything. Yes, sir."

"Here is an extra dollar for you. Much obliged, boys. You are always willing to help me out, and I do not forget it."

"Bet your life we are, Mr. Carter," replied one of them; and a general murmur of approval of the remark went the round of the group.

Nick leaped upon a cross-town car and was carried to Second Avenue.

When he arrived at the spot, or near it, where the cabby had left Prime and his companion, the detective paused there a moment, looking around him.

"If Manan Drechm had intended to take his victim south from Forty-second Street," he mused, "he would have had the cab stop above instead of below it. The likelihood is that he induced him to enter some saloon where he doped him, and so got him entirely in his power."

He started down the avenue, stopping in every saloon he came to, but he had walked several blocks before he discovered the one he wanted.

In each of the saloons he entered he asked the same line of questions, describing the two men he was tracing; and, at last, he received a satisfying answer.

"Yes," said the bartender, "they were in here a little before eight o'clock. I was off duty at the time, but I was here, in front of the bar. I remember them very well indeed."

"Tell me all about them that you remember."

"Why, to tell the truth, I didn't notice them at all until it became apparent that the old party with the whiskers was very drunk. I did not notice it when they came in; but he had a souse, all right."

"The fact of the matter is," said Nick, "that he didn't have a souse, as you call it, at all, but the man who was with him managed somehow to drop something into his drink to make it appear so. That is the reason you did not notice his condition at first. Now, what happened after that?"

"Nothing at all, only that the red-headed one took his friend out."

"I saw them both after that," said one of the customers of the place, pushing his way forward at this juncture.

"Tell me what you know," said the detective.

"I have heard what you and Peter have been saying, and I remember that I met both of the men that you have described on Thirty-ninth Street, between First and Second Avenues. The big man was very drunk—or appeared to be so; you say he was likely enough drugged—and the red-headed one was helping him along."

Nick thanked the man and went out; but he hurried to the nearest police-station and asked the lieutenant at the desk if any report had been made of a man or a body being found that answered to the description of Prime; and he gave it again in detail.

At first the lieutenant appeared uninterested; then he looked surprised; and then he opened a book on the desk before him, and said slowly:

"That party you're talking about, Mr. Carter, was pulled out of the East River this morning, down near Twenty-eighth Street, almost at the door of the morgue. We got a report about it—one of the general reports and descriptions that the department sends in such cases, to each of the station-houses in the [illegible] you know—we got it only a little while ago. [illegible] find him at the morgue, sir."

And Nick did find him there, laid out on one of the slabs and awaiting identification.

It was unmistakably J. D. Prime. The body had been found that morning, at the end of one of the piers where the clothing had caught upon a projecting nail in a spile and so kept the body afloat, and also prevented it from drifting out with the tide.

There was not a single mark of violence upon the body anywhere. Apparently, nothing had been taken from the pockets.

Prime's money, diamonds, and watch had been found intact, only, strangely enough, there was nothing about him by which he could be identified, save that his three initials were engraved inside the case of his watch.

"Evidently," thought the detective, "Manan Dreehm took time enough to remove the means of immediate identification from Prime's clothing before he shoved him into the river to drown and to float out to sea, as he would have done but for the accident that the clothing caught on a nail at one of the pier-heads."

But the fourth witness against Sindahr Goosh, or Danton—against the hypnotic thief, was also dead, and, therefore, could not testify against him.

This time, however, there was something to be obtained in the way of explanation concerning how the man had been killed.

There was no doubt in the mind of the detective that Prime had first been drugged by Manan, but not sufficiently to prevent him from staggering along if he were partly supported. After that he had been led by easy stages toward the river, and, doubtless before he was pushed into it, another dose had been administered to him, to kill him.

Nick went to the superintendent of the gruesome place and made the necessary identification; he arranged also that a post mortem should be held to determine exactly what had killed the man—that is, whether he had really been drowned, or if he had died before he had taken sufficient water into his lungs to have killed him.

Next he notified by wire the people at Mr. Prime's home, and after that he went to the station-house of the precinct, where he made a full report of the matter, to be turned over to the proper authorities.

With all that attended to, he returned to his own home to find if anything had been heard of Chick; and, besides, it wanted but a short time of the hour when Danton was to report to him.

He wondered if Danton would have the nerve—and the courage—to make that report to him.

For Danton, although he had arranged, and through no less a person than Patsy, a perfect alibi as opposed to his participation in any of the four crimes that had been committed at his direction, was still, without doubt, the really guilty party.

That is, he had sent Manan to do the work; to commit the several crimes, while he himself had gone about the city in the company of Nick Carter's second assistant.

And Manan, too, had made some effort at the alibi business.

Nick recalled now the episode of the theater-seat coupon. He remembered how Manan had picked it up from the floor and returned it to his pocket. He had wanted it to use, if the necessity should arise, to establish an assertion that he was at the theater at the very time when Prime was being led to his death.

It was a quarter to twelve when the detective entered his own house.

That had been an exceedingly busy morning. He had not been idle since leaving the breakfast-table, as the reader realizes, and he had discovered much in that time.

Chick had sent no word to the house, and had not been seen, and Nick was greatly perturbed by the intelligence, for if the terrible Manan could accomplish so much, and do it all so stealthily, as against the four witnesses, why should he not also have succeeded in doing away with Chick.

Chick had certainly disappeared, and there was no clue left behind him whereby he could be traced, unless Patsy, upon whose trail he had been, could supply something of the kind.

Then the electric bell rang and the detective heard Joseph at the door.

A moment later he heard the voice of Patsy, and then of Danton; and he rose from his chair and went down the stairs to meet the head villain of the matter.

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER IS SQUARELY DEFIED.

Danton was still outwardly Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton. Evidently he had not thought it necessary, before returning to the detective, to resume his disguise as Sindahr Goosh; and there was a gleam of triumph in his wonderful eyes and a smile of self-assurance upon his lips as he rose to greet the detective when Nick entered the room.

"I am here promptly, as you observe, Mr. Carter," he said easily. "The three days you gave me in which to arrange my affairs have expired, and I have returned according to contract."

"You have failed to observe one part of your contract, however," replied the detective coldly.

"Indeed? How is that?"

"You were to return here to me as Sindahr Goosh. The prince was to have disappeared."

"I am still out on bail, you know," was the cool reply.

"Yes; but as Sindahr Goosh; not as the prince."

Danton shrugged his shoulders after the manner of one who is bored by a trivial matter; and, after a moment, he said:

"I can easily make the change here in your house, if you require it. But I had hopes that you would permit me to go on in this manner for a little while longer."

The detective looked at his watch.

"In fifteen minutes," he said slowly, "I shall take you before a magistrate. It remains for you to determine whether you prefer to go there as Prince Edouard, or as Sindahr."

"You intend to take me before a magistrate?" exclaimed Danton.

"Yes."

"May I ask for what reason?"

"For one thing, to have your bondsman discharged and you ordered back to jail. I have already notified the district attorney to assist me in that."

"Indeed!" with smiling scorn in his voice and eyes. "May I further ask when you expect to accomplish by this means?"

"Your present imprisonment, where you can do no harm to anybody, and also your ultimate conviction for the many crimes you have committed."

"You amaze me, Mr. Carter. You really do. Your action may be the letter, but it is certainly not according to the spirit of our contract. I——"

"There was no contract between us, Danton," interrupted the detective harshly. "Understand that. I merely permitted you to do certain things."

"Well, I have done them, haven't I? And as they were outlined? Mr. Garvan has been with me every minute of the time. I rely upon his testimony, and do not attempt to force my own upon you."

"Possibly," said the detective quietly, "you may have noticed a moment ago when you asked me why I was going to take you before a magistrate, I replied, that *for one* reason it was to have your bondsman discharged, and you remanded back to jail. You have not asked me if there are other reasons."

"I naturally supposed there could be no others."

"There are others."

"Will you tell me what they are?"

"Yes. I intend, when I get you before a magistrate, to charge you with four murders."

Danton did not turn a hair. Not an eyelid quivered. The expression of his face did not change.

"Well, well!" he replied smilingly. "You amaze me. Four murders! Four! When did you say these four crimes were committed?"

"I did not say. Within the last three days."

"H'm! That is a trifle better than one a day. It ought to be the record, Mr. Carter."

"I have no doubt that it is. I shall charge you with being an accessory before the fact, and I shall prove it. And let me tell you this, you fiend: If harm has befallen my first assistant, who has disappeared, I will never take my eyes from you until I see you squirming in the electric chair."

Danton turned to Patsy as if he were greatly bored. He even pretended that he suppressed a yawn.

"Mr. Garvan," he said, "won't you testify for me in this matter. The charges are so absurd that I find it impossible to reply to them."

"Mr. Garvan need make no statement at all regarding this matter," said the detective. "I know that he has been with you; that you have your alibi in each case; that you have personally done nothing; but I also know that you instigated and then directed the entire affair in each case, and that the man who poses as your servant committed the murders."

"Manan?"

"Yes."

"Impossible. He hasn't the courage to do such things."

"That matter is proof to your own, to greater. I have talked with him; I did so last night. I can read the man."

"Have you a warrant against me for the crimes you refer to?"

"No. That is not necessary, for I shall take you with me if you have to go in an ambulance."

"Dear me! I haven't any objection whatever to going, for I don't believe that any magistrate in the city would commit me on any such wild charge as you make, and on your have expressed that you believe I was an accessory before the fact."

Nick Carter did not believe so either, but had no one scintilla of proof to support the charge in any case.

"Patsy," he said presently, "you remain here with Danton while I go to the telephone. I will be back in a few minutes. While I am gone, Danton, you might amuse yourself by restoring the outward appearance of Sindahr Goosh, unless you wish to be re-arrested as the prince."

He went out then, and was gone longer than he had meant to be, for his conversation with the magistrate to whom he talked was more lengthy than he had supposed would be necessary.

When he returned to the reception-room where he had left Danton in Patsy's charge, it was to find that Danton had himself disappeared, and that Patsy was sitting bolt upright in his chair, rigid and apparently unconscious.

Then Patsy spoke, in rather a strange manner, too. He said:

"I was to tell you, as soon as you returned, that Prince Edouard Thiers-Danton was obliged to leave the house for a little while, but that he would return in an hour, prepared to accompany you to the magistrate if you so willed."

Patsy recited this like a lesson that has been learned, and then he opened his eyes to consciousness and started to his feet.

"Where is Danton?" he demanded, looking about him.

"He put you to sleep and then walked out of the house," replied Nick. "But he won't go far, I imagine. He left word that he would return here in an hour, and I should not be surprised if he did so. As the case stands now, he really has little or nothing to fear. The magistrate to whom I telephoned says that he could not hold the man on such a charge as I could make, unsubstantiated as it is. Tell me what he did to you."

"I don't know. He took a round package from one of his pockets and asked me, 'Did you ever see this?' I looked to see what it was, and that is the last I remember."

"It was the crystal, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"You see," said the detective, "he wanted an opportunity to get away from us long enough to communicate with Manan Dreehm—and he took that method of obtaining it."

"Confound him! I wonder if he has tried this game on me before, and made me forget all about it?"

"I doubt it—unless you remember to have been shown the crystal before."

"No."

"Then he has not done it."

"Ought we not to go after him?"

"Where to? His rooms?"

"No; they were already being dismantled when we came away."

"Patsy, I am going to leave the fellow utterly alone for a time; for several days, if necessary."

"You are? Why?"

"Well, for one thing, he won't run away. He is too confident of his own position for that—and I have got to have proof before I can clinch this affair."

"What about the real murderer? What about Manan?"

"I don't think he will run away, either. He is also confident that I can prove nothing; but there must be a way, and I will find it."

"Hadn't I better do a little shadow work while you are looking for evidence?"

"No. Your business will be to go out and search for Chick. I don't believe he has been murdered—I can't believe it."

"Well, there is still one witness left. There is the pompous chap——"

"His body is over at the morgue at this minute, Patsy."

"Good gracious! He, also?"

"Yes. Drugged and thrown into the river last night. Lured away from the station where he was waiting to take a train, he was taken to the river."

"And Chick and you are the only ones left to testify against them, now; eh?"

"Are we available? Where is Chick? He disappeared last night. I have not heard from him. Something has happened to him; but what? You knew that he was shadowing you, of course? You and Danton?"

"Certainly."

"Did you see him last night?"

"Yes."

"Where was he the last time you saw him?"

"We were coming out of Madam Savage's house. I saw him across the street."

"What time was that?"

"About an hour and a half before we encountered you."

"Well, get out on the street, Patsy, and see what you can do to trace him. There may be a clue lying around somewhere, and you must find it. I have got to search for some proofs to establish at least one of these cases of murder."

"Suppose Danton should return here after an hour, as he promised; what then?"

"I shall tell Joseph to close the door in his face. It will at least surprise him and give him something to think about."

"I am afraid that both of the men will take the opportunity to get away."

"No. They will not do that. They are too certain of their position. They think now that they are perfectly safe. Danton intends to make some move to get himself discharged, and in that case I think he would reappear as the prince and defy me to expose him as Sindahr Goosh. But I surely should expose him all the same."

And so Joseph was given the necessary directions.

He was told that if Danton returned at the end of an hour, as he had said he would do, to shut the door in his face.

After that, Nick and Patsy left the house, and departed in separate ways.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOOTPRINT ON THE ROOF.

Things had happened so swiftly during the three days just passed that the detective had had no opportunity to look up the particulars of any of the sudden deaths that had taken away, one after another, the four—and now, counting the disappearance of Chick—the five necessary witnesses to the conviction of the hypnotic thief.

But now he went to his garage, procured his automobile, and drove himself to the Calathumpian apartment-house, where Mrs. Haldeen had lived, and died.

He first talked with the manager, and presently had brought before him in the private office all the men who had been on duty at the time when Mrs. Haldeen must have fallen or leaped or been thrown from the window to the roof of the adjoining house.

To them, when they were all before him, he said:

"I want you all to take your minds back to the time of the death of Mrs. Haldeen. I wish to know if any of you, or how many of you, remembers having seen a red-haired man enter or leave the house anywhere near those hours."

There were three who recalled such a circumstance. They were the man at the door, whose business it was to swing the rotary storm-door for people to enter; the clerk at the desk, and the elevator-boy on duty at the time.

Their stories agreed, too, in reference to the man.

He had entered the house with a box that looked as if it might contain a dress, had stopped at the desk, stating there that the package was for Mrs. Haldeen to inspect, and that he was expected. Her name was on the paper that wrapped the box, and also the name of the firm from which it was supposed to have come.

The man was permitted to go right up. The elevator-boy remembered taking him to that floor.

A little later—some said fifteen minutes, one said ten—the red-haired man had descended again in the elevator, with the box in charge, and had gone out and away; and that was all that was known about him.

When they were asked to give a more particular description of the man, it was:

Red hair; dark eyes; light build; quick motions; dark clothing; derby hat. The clerk recalled the name of the firm that was printed upon the wrappings of the box, as Coke & Winfield, Fifth Avenue.

It was so many hours after the visit of this man that the body was discovered on the adjoining roof, that he could not possibly be connected directly with the event. But it was the red-haired man again, for all that.

Nick next called upon Coke & Winfield.

He discovered there that they did not even know Mrs. Haldeen, and had never had any dealings with her. She was not a customer of the place, and no package had been sent to her at that time from their store.

And that included all the information that was obtainable.

But he had established one thing definitely, and that was that the red-haired man had appeared in every one of the cases.

A red-haired man had engaged the automobile that ran down Acton Oakes.

A red-haired man had carried the package to Mrs. Haldeen, and was necessarily the last person who saw her alive.

A red-haired man had called at the house of Professor Ball—but had not been admitted—three hours before the professor was blown up. He had doubtless made his way later to the roof of the building.

A red-haired man had led J. D. Prime to his death in the river.

The detective pondered over the matter for a little time, and then he sought that row of houses along the block where Professor Ball had lived.

Arrived there, he called first upon Mr. Morgan, the professor's friend; and he asked him:

"You are more or less acquainted along this block, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, I know several of the residents along here, Mr. Carter. Why?"

"I want you to go with me from house to house, beginning with the one nearest to the professor's, and help me to make some inquiries. Will you?"

"Yes."

"After you have heard me ask the first lot of questions, you can assist me, and we will save time if you work one house while I work another; and so on."

At the first house at which he applied, the detective asked the following question:

"I wish to know if any person applied at this house yesterday, between noon and three o'clock, for permission to go through the house to the roof, and I wish you to be absolutely certain about the matter, one way or another, before you answer the question definitely."

The answer was a positive negative; and Nick passed on to the adjoining house, while Mr. Morgan took the one next to that.

In this manner they worked their way along the block for a considerable distance, when, as Nick was turning away from another positive negative, Morgan called to him from the next stoop.

"Come here, Carter," he said. "I have found the house at last."

It was the gentleman who owned the house who replied to the questions.

"Yes," he said. "There was such a request made of me yesterday."

"Did you grant it?" asked Nick.

"Yes. I hesitated to do so at first, but he showed his badge, and——"

"What sort of badge was it?"

"The telephone company."

"So you admitted him?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"I went with him to the scuttle. I informed him, when I let him out upon the roof, that I should hook it after him, and that when he was ready to descend, if he would rap upon it with one of his tools, somebody would come to let him down again."

"Well?"

"He replied that he should be engaged about half an hour, thanked me, and disappeared. I locked the scuttle—that is, hooked it—and descended the stairs again."

"Was he a red-haired man?"

"Yes."

"With dark eyes? Did you notice?"

"Yes. I did notice that he had unusually dark eyes for one whose hair was red."

"Did it occur to you that the hair might be a wig?"

"No; it did not."

"What time was he here?"

"A little before two, if I remember correctly."

"I think you do. Did he have anything in particular to say to you?"

"Nothing only what he would naturally say in preferring such a request as he made."

"Did he return to the street through your house?"

"Yes."

"What time was that?"

"I think he had been gone less than half an hour, if anything."

"Did he have anything to say to you then?"

"Only that he had found very little to do—was greatly obliged."

"Did you let him out of the house yourself?"

"Yes."

"Of course you had never seen the man before?" Nick asked this question without expecting an affirmative reply, and was greatly astonished when he received one.

"Oddly enough, I had seen him before, Mr. Carter. I did not recall the fact till later, but then I remembered it."

"Where had you seen him previously?"

"I saw him passing the house about eleven o'clock yesterday morning, only he was not at that time dressed as if he were a lineman. If I had recognized him as that man, when he first applied here, I would not have admitted him."

"He was on his way to make a call at that time," said the detective. "The question is, if you should see that man again, would you be able to identify him?"

"I most certainly would be."

"Did you notice anything that he carried with him to the roof, other than his tools?"

"Yes; one thing. I even asked him what it was."

"What was it?"

"A bottle. I asked him what it contained, for it struck me that he handled it with extreme care."

"What was his reply to that question?"

"He said it was glycerin, for lubrication. He said that frequently it was necessary to do some drilling and oil was necessary in such a case, and that he used glycerin because it did not leave a black smudge anywhere. I thought it a very reasonable answer, and said no more about it."

"It *was* glycerin, sir; nitroglycerin."

"Good Heaven!"

"Will you permit me to venture upon your roof, also?" asked Nick.

"Certainly. I should warn you, however, to be careful. My roof is made of a combination of tar and gravel. I find it cooler than a tin roof in summer. I think the gravel must be worn away or displaced in some place, for when that man came down he tracked it into the house. I did not discover it till later."

"Thank you," replied the detective. "I will be very careful not to do the same."

Followed by Morgan he went out upon the roof, and, as soon as they were there, he said:

"Mr. Morgan, look with all your eyes for the imprint of a foot somewhere on this roof. If I can only find it——"

"There it is now, Carter. I see it;" and Morgan pointed with his finger.

But the detective had also discovered it while he was talking, and immediately bent forward to examine it closer.

The imprint was the perfect outline of the sole of a shoe, save for the place where the ball had touched. There a portion of the tar had clung to the leather, and had evidently stuck there, and was doubtless what had been tracked into the house.

But the rest of the imprint was perfect.

It showed where under the ball of the foot, next to the little toe, a portion of the sole had been worn away, and here the marks of the threads with which the sole had been sewed had left their impress.

More than that, there was a curious markings of four nails in the middle of the sole of the shoe; it was

as if the shoes had squeaked, and their owner had taken that method of stopping the annoyance.

The position of these nails was like this: · ⁚ ·

The toe of the imprint pointed toward the house where the professor had been killed, and Nick walked on over the roofs, stopping now and then to use a magnifying-glass and to study something that he found.

These were stains of tar; just spots which the glass enabled him to recognize, where that bit of tar that had been lifted by the heel of the shoe had left its mark.

"Morgan," he said, as they turned back toward the scuttle, "I think I've got him."

CHAPTER XII.

THE THREE THINGS NECESSARY.

"There are now three things that I must find with the least possible delay," the detective told himself after taking leave of Mr. Morgan and starting along the street again.

He felt that he had accomplished a great deal already, but there was still much to do.

At the risk of offending the man who had permitted them to pass through his house to the roof, he had cut out and carefully wrapped up a square of the tarred roof which contained the imprint of the murderer's foot, with its telltale marks.

When he passed through the house on his way out, he told what he had done, and added:

"I will telephone at once for an expert roofer I know, to come and make necessary repairs for you, and I will pay the bill."

The gentleman smiled and replied:

"My roof has long needed some attention, Mr. Carter. If I think you have done me any damage, I will inform you. Let it go at that."

And now the detective repeated again:

"Three things I must find with the least possible delay. A shoe with a sole that will match this imprint in tar; a red wig; and a man that both will fit. I know who the man is, and I haven't the least doubt that I can find him. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised to see him standing around on corners grinning at me, and doubtless he has got the shoe I want, on that right foot of his. But where shall I look for the wig?

"It wasn't in his room last night, because it was most probably in one of his pockets; and now that he is through with it, possibly he has thrown it away. I hope not, for with it I will be able to have him identified.

"It's rather odd that he didn't change the color of his wigs. I suppose he believed that the deaths would all be so apparently the result of accidents, that he did not suppose the matters would ever be inquired into."

He walked on a considerable distance farther, and then suddenly turned his steps toward the house where Prince Edouard had had his apartments.

"Patsy said they were already in process of dismantlement," he said to himself, "but all the same I think I'll take a look-in there. It may not be without result."

He saw, when he left the elevator, that the doors of the apartment were open, and, as he crossed the threshold, he came suddenly face to face with Danton himself, who was in the act of turning toward the door, probably to take his departure.

The man stopped in his tracks and smiled.

"I was just going to your house," he said mildly. "I have been there once already, but your man wouldn't let me in. I thought I'd have another try at it."

"I instructed him not to admit you," said the detective.

"Then I suppose I am to assume that you have changed your mind in regard to the magistrate?"

"For the present—yes."

"I ought to be very grateful; eh?"

"As you please."

"May I ask what brought you here?"

"Curiosity."

"Then I think I may leave you here to gratify it."

Danton turned away, but he had taken only a step when Nick called to him.

"Danton," he said, "if you are not back in the Sindahr Goosh costume before nightfall, I shall send for two or three reporters and give them the whole story."

The fellow made no reply. He merely shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and went out.

There were two men there engaged in packing together the things that had decorated the rooms, but they paid no attention to Nick or he to them. He left them in the front room where they were at work, and passed through to the rear of the apartment.

Here were several trunks, locked and strapped, and ready to be taken away.

"If I could only determine which one of these belongs to Manan," he mused, "I would go through it; as it is—well, I will select the smallest and meanest first, and go through them all, if necessary."

He turned and locked the door of the room after him, and then began his task.

Trunk-locks are usually very simple contrivances, as every one knows. Almost any one can pick such a lock, with patience. To Nick Carter the task was simple indeed.

He followed out his idea of selecting the smallest and meanest one first, and speedily had it open before him; and then, as he glanced inside of it, he uttered a low-toned exclamation of pleasure.

There was no tray to the trunk, and directly on top of all the other things was a red wig—the very one, doubtless, he sought, and with the maker's name inside.

Without undue haste he deposited it in his pocket; and then he began an examination of the articles that remained.

In this he was more than fortunate, for presently he discovered a chauffeur's mask and cap; next he uncovered a suit of clothing that had several times been described to him as worn by the man with the red hair; and then—greatest discovery of all—a pair of old and much-worn shoes.

They were *the* shoes, too. He knew that.

The right one had four nails in the sole, driven there in such positions that a line drawn around them would have comprehended a perfect diamond in shape; and at the base of the heel of that same shoe the stain of the tar, in which the man had trod, could still be seen.

The shoes had been wrapped in paper before they were deposited in the trunk, and, as the detective started to make use of it again for the same purpose, he was startled to discover, printed in large letters, the firm name of "Coke & Winfield, Fifth Avenue." Then he looked farther, and in another place on the paper found written the name and address of Mrs. Haldeen. It was the very paper that had covered the parcel that the red-headed man had taken to the Calathumpian to deliver to her.

The detective felt that these things supplied all the evidence he needed, and he wrapped them together hastily, using some old newspapers to enclose them, and then, with the bundle beneath his arm, let himself quietly out at the rear door, made his way to the elevator, and so out of the house.

He had taken care to leave things in the trunk as nearly as possible as he found them, although, of course, the wig was not there on top; but he had to take his chances as to that.

"I've got the wig and the shoes; now for the man," he told himself, as he went out upon the street.

In order to rid himself of the bundle and still know that it was safe, he went directly to his own house, arriving there twenty minutes later; and, as he ran up the steps toward the front door, it opened, and Danton, in the proper attire for Sindahr Goosh, came out.

"Ah!" the fellow exclaimed as soon as he saw the detective. "It seems that you are here. Will you permit yourself to be seen, Mr. Carter?" he added ironically.

Without waiting for a reply he stepped back again through the door into the house, Nick following, and, as he did so, the detective saw the figure of Manan Dreehm pass through the door that opened into the reception-room.

"Go in there," said Nick to Danton, and as if he had not seen the other man; and he followed them both through the doorway and closed it after him. He had tossed the bundle into the hands of Joseph, in the hall, as he entered the house, with the warning, "Take good care of that, Joseph."

Now, as he closed the door of the room behind him and found that both the men were facing him, he took one quick step forward, and then, without the least warning, he struck out with all the strength he could command.

The blow landed exactly where he had intended it should; that is, on the point of the chin of Manan Dreehm, and that individual shot into the air backward and then collapsed on the floor as if he had been hit by a bullet.

"What the devil do you mean, you——" cried out Danton; but he got no further than that, for a second blow, this time a left-hander, caught him under the ear, and he followed the example of his servant; and both men remained where they fell.

"I'll teach you fellows to get fresh with Nick Carter!" smiled the detective, as he looked down upon them. Then he stepped to the door and called Joseph.

"Telephone to headquarters that I've got two men here whom I wish to have taken directly there, and not to the station-house," he said.

He returned to the room then where he had left the men and busied himself in putting the irons on these; and he had just completed the job and stood erect, when the door opened and Patsy came into the hall.

"I have found him!" he exclaimed. "I have found Chick. He is at the New York Hospital with a lump on his head the size of a baseball. He got it last night, in the street, when he was following us home from Madam Savage's; and he must have been taken in a cab after that, and thrown into the river, for he came to himself in the water, yelled to a couple of junkmen who were passing in a boat, and got them to help him out. He hasn't the least idea who hit him, though."

"Of course not. How is he?"

"Oh, he'll be around all right in a day or two, the doctor told me."

* * * * * * *

"Carter," said the district attorney, when Nick had laid all the evidence before him in the murder case, "we haven't got a leg to stand on in connecting Sindahr Goosh with the crimes of his servant. Of course, we know that he is really the guilty party, but there is not the least bit of proof to connect him with these crimes unless Manan chooses to implicate him. But I think with your testimony and Chick's we can convict him of the hypnotic thefts, and we will hope that at the trial of Manan something will turn up to demonstrate his connection with the other cases. As for the case you have made against Manan, it is a dead open and shut. The man is as good as convicted now."

THE END.

The next number, 507, will contain "Vanderbeen, the Millionaire; or, Nick Carter's Defense of an Heiress."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

The man in uniform in the down-town bank is a good deal more than a sign-post. From 9 A. M. until after banking hours he stands there apparently for the sole purpose of directing strangers to the proper windows. But there is a good deal more that he does.

That is why at the larger banks there is only one among the doormen who is not an old policeman. Many of them were detective sergeants, one was a captain, and the majority of the others were Broadway squad men.

The chief duty of these men is to watch faces and warn the tellers of persons they suspect. Most of them are familiar with the faces of the old crooks and are able to pick out the new crooks almost instantly.

The knowledge of faces that some of these doormen of the past possessed was remarkable. A story is told of George H. Hewitt, who for thirty-one years was the doorman of the First National Bank, which is typical of all these men.

A man came in who fifteen years before had been a depositor at the bank. He had gone to Europe and after that lapse of time had come back with a beard and fifteen years more of life on his shoulders. As soon as he entered the bank Hewitt was there with his greeting, "Good morning, Mr. Farr," as though the man had been away for but a week. There were probably ten thousand men who in the course of a decade dealt with the First National. Hewitt knew every one of them.

There is another duty that these doormen perform. Often during the course of the day one of the clerks is sent out with a large sum of money to another bank. The doorman always accompanies him to see that his progress through the crowded streets is not interrupted by some crook who knows the value of the roll the clerk carries with him.

In the old days the police force stationed men at many of the larger banks. Hewitt was one of these men.

Then when the department called in these men and made the banks provide their own guards the officers of the bank asked Hewitt to leave the force and stay with them. He was there more than a third of a century.

The only police captain in this business some years back was Francis J. Kear, of the Central Trust Company. Kear retired on his pension, but instead of living in idleness could be seen every day watching the faces that entered the trust company, looking for old acquaintances in the crooked world.

Another old-timer was Christopher Smith, of the Merchants Bank. Smith had the post at Broadway and Chambers Street for eighteen years. There was not a prominent New Yorker in the old days that he did not know.

One day President Grant was crossing the street there when a truck came tearing around the corner. Smith grabbed the President just in time and saved him from injury. The General turned to him with a humorous expression on his face and said:

"You are the first man who ever jerked me around like that."

After that whenever Grant passed that way he had a cigar for the officer on the post. Smith had tales to tell of all the men of that day, Arthur, Tilden, Tweed, Roscoe Conkling. There was not a judge that he did not know, nor a mayor.

Dennis McMahon, of the Chemical, was for twenty-three years the detective assigned to the Grand Central Station. His partner, John Gilliagan, was for years on the Broadway squad.

Mike Crawley, of the Importers and Traders Bank, was a detective sergeant, as was Tom Humphries, of the Mechanics Bank. George Dennison, of the Bank of New York, used to serve under Byrnes. King, of the Empire Building; Joe O'Connor, of Baring Goulds, and George Ludgate, of the Manhattan Company, were once old policemen.

Tom Beatty, of the New York Life Building, was for twenty-seven years on the Broadway post between Reade and Franklin Streets. The only notable exception to the rule was George F. Lawlor, of the Park National Bank, and in Lawlor's case they had a man who had studied criminology for twenty-five years.

In the Power of the Assassins.

BY F. W. BRIDGENORTH.

"I'll tell you one thing, Des; I don't like that fellow Marney, at all."

"I can't say I'm in love with him myself, Jack," was young Nolan's reply, as he touched his horse's flank with his heel. "He seems to satisfy father, though, but—there! never mind him; let's take that stone wall."

And "take it" they did, in a style calculated to please the most daring of cross-country riders.

The last speaker was Desmond, son of Sir Fergus Nolan, of Castle Nolan, in the west of Ireland. He had spent the last four years at school in England, and had just returned for a short vacation before proceeding to

Oxford. Jack Barfield, his chum, was spending the holidays with him, and would accompany him to the university. Sir Fergus, who had not visited his old home since his wife's death, five years ago, traveled with the boys to Dublin, but there received news which impelled him to remain, Desmond and Jack going on alone, their places on the coach having been booked. Sir Fergus, however, was in hope of being able to join his son in a few days.

Mr. Peter Marney, who managed the Nolan estates, had received the two boys in a way that struck Jack Barfield, who was of a more observant nature than his friend, as not wholly sincere. Hence the remark of his which opens this story.

It was the day after their arrival, and the chums were having an afternoon canter. Desmond's horse was a bit fresh, and needed careful handling, though the boy was inclined to let the animal have its fling. Eventually he left Jack far behind.

Suddenly, as if from the ground, a shambling, shock-headed figure sprang into view. The swift-rushing steed threw up its head at the sight, and, swerving aside, stretched its neck and tore madly away.

"Bolting's your game, is it?" muttered Desmond.

Holding on with hands and knees, he tried all he knew to stop the runaway—to no purpose.

"How would it end?" was the thought that flashed through his mind.

Desmond gave a swift look round to see if Jack was in sight. He was not.

Just ahead stood a wall of more than usual height. Up and forward they leaped—horse and rider. Then a crash—a fall—a heavy thud, and—darkness.

Some miles from Castle Nolan, among rugged hills, stood the ruins of an ancient stronghold. It was little more than a pile of stones, the portion of the walls still standing bearing many signs of bygone conflicts.

In this gloomy place several men gathered one night. A few candles illumined the cheerless interior, and shone upon the dark, lowering faces of the company.

"What keeps Arty O'Connor?" asked one of another.

"Hark! that's his step. He has some one with him—a stranger."

Next moment a tall, powerful man appeared, leading a youth, gagged, blindfolded, and limping painfully. The latter was Desmond Nolan.

"The son of the oppressor," said O'Connor, as the others regarded him questioningly. "I found him insensible as I was journeying here. His horse lay near him, dead. The boy is not much hurt. Fate has placed him in our hands. The tyrant who has persecuted us shall suffer through his son. The Nolans of Castle Nolan shall be rooted out—abolished. We have met to avenge our wrongs; let us now strike the first blow! What say you?"

A murmur of assent went up.

"Are we all here?"

"All but Denis Cregan; he is ill," was the answer.

"No matter; he is with us in spirit. No need to cast lots, brothers, mine shall be the task to slay yonder brat! Stand aside!"

With this he produced a pistol and leveled it at the prisoner's head. His finger was on the trigger. Another moment and Desmond would have been no more.

Suddenly a man, pale and breathless, staggered into the ruins.

"Cregan!" exclaimed all, in surprise.

"Yes," cried the newcomer hoarsely, "I felt I must see you to-night even at the risk of my life."

He glanced at the captive, and then at the rest. The situation was explained.

"Thank Heaven I came!" he ejaculated. "I've heard something that——"

A fit of coughing interrupted him.

"What have you heard?" asked O'Connor, after a pause.

"That Sir Fergus Nolan's not the hard man Marney's made him out. Marney's deceived him and us. He's the miscreant; he's ground us down for his own evil ends, and he lied when he said it was by Sir Fergus' orders."

O'Connor and the others stared at him in silence, then drew together and began to talk among themselves, questioning and cross-questioning the bearer of this startling news. Some were for crediting what he said, but the majority remained steadfast in their hatred for Sir Fergus Nolan. The leader at last spoke.

"'Tis best to be cautious, brothers; but we cannot let this brat go free."

After further discussion, two men seized Desmond and bore him through an archway into a smaller chamber. Here he was thrown upon the floor and bound to a huge ring embedded in the stones.

Some time later, the conspirators quitted the ruins, leaving one of their number to remain in charge of the prisoner.

The boy understood scarcely a word of what had passed. The men had spoken entirely in the native Irish, of which tongue he knew but little. He was still dazed and weak from the shock of his wild ride and the terrible fall at its finish. A feeling of dread paralyzed his nerves as he lay there on the cold floor listening to the footsteps of his custodian.

An hour must have passed, when, all at once, a cry broke out near him, followed by the sound of a furious struggle. Presently all was still, save for a noise like heavy breathing.

"Masther Desmond, are ye there?"

As the words were uttered, the boy felt two hands touch him and fumble about the cords that bound him. In two minutes he was free and on his feet. When his

eyes became accustomed to the gloom, he saw before him the same shock-headed creature, whose sudden appearance had startled his horse and resulted in his accident. This was Michael Cloony, a half-witted dependent of the Nolan household.

"Sure, sir," he said, "I could kill myself for frightening your horse. I tried to find you all day long, and just as I was giving it up, I saw Arty O'Connor bringing you here. I watched him, knowing him for one of the Secret League, and seeing as you was blindfold and gagged, and limping badly, I crept after you to this place, and——"

"What d'ye think it means, Mike?"

"There's a plot against the Nolans, sir, but Mike Cloony'll save both you and your father. Come with me, sir, and I'll tell ye the whole of it on the way."

Supported by the faithful fellow, Desmond passed out into the larger chamber. On the floor lay the body of his late guard, insensible.

"I had to do it, sir," said Mike, indicating the prostrate form. "That's right, sir; try to step out bravely, and trust to me."

But Desmond's weakness, which excitement had overpowered, increased; and just as they reached the outskirts of the ruins, he chanced to kick his injured foot against a stone. A cry of agony broke from him, the little strength he possessed left him, and he sank, fainting, on the ground.

Mike looked down at him for a moment. Then, without a word, he hoisted the boy onto his back, and bore him away across the hillside.

Sir Fergus Nolan paced agitatedly up and down the library on the night of his arrival at his old home. Desmond had been missing four days, and not the faintest clue to his whereabouts had been found.

"We shall only find the poor fellow's dead body," was the opinion of more than one.

Jack Barfield, who had lost himself for hours on the hills trying to find his chum on the day of the accident, had been untiring in his efforts, and was still hopeful.

"What fate has befallen my poor boy?" cried Sir Fergus, in the agony of his spirit.

As he spoke he heard a yell outside the house, and as he reached the door the report of a gun awoke the echoes. Running to the spot where he saw the flash, he came upon two kneeling forms holding a third on the ground.

"It's me and Masther Desmond's friend, sir," said one of the kneeling figures, Mike Cloony. "We've got old Marney here. We saw him behind the bush yonder with a gun pointed at yer honor. He could see ye through the windy."

"Yes," put in Jack Barfield; "we jumped on him, and the gun went off in the struggle."

"I owe you both my life, then. I'll not forget it. I fancy, from what has recently come to my knowledge, that I know why this rascal wishes me dead."

Some men servants had arrived by this time, and these Sir Fergus ordered to take charge of Marney till the morning.

"Cloony wishes to see you, sir," said Jack. "I met him coming here. It's about Desmond; he's alive and well."

"Thank Heaven! Where is he?"

"Six miles from here, in a place no one knows but me," said Mike. "I took him there to save him from the Secret League."

Sir Fergus waited for no more. Fifteen minutes after the three were driving through a drizzling rain toward the hills. On the way, Mike explained more fully the cause of his young master's strange disappearance, and told how Desmond's injured foot had prevented his leaving his present whereabouts before. The others understood the full significance of this later. Sir Fergus could not scold the poor lad; there would be no convincing him that he had not done the best thing possible in keeping Desmond's place of concealment secret, believing, as he did, that only thus could the vengeance of O'Connor and his fellows be eluded.

At length they were obliged to leave the vehicle and proceed on foot, finally arriving at the top of a steep, sloping precipice.

"He's down there, sir," said Mike.

Sir Fergus started; not till then did he remember that the lad was half-witted.

"He's in my cave," Mike went on.

"How did you get him there?" asked Jack, in wonder.

For answer Cloony stooped and sprang down to a point of rock a few yards below.

"Desmond! Desmond!" shouted Jack, and an answering hail came from beneath.

"Hurrah! he's all right. But if this is the only way he can come up, he'll want help."

So saying, Jack kicked off his shoes and discarded his coat and hat.

"I shall have to hold on by my toes, and my coat would only be in the way," he said, as he let himself over.

In a few minutes he was able to see what was invisible before. From a hole behind a patch of scrub Mike drew a coil of rope, at one end of which was a loop. Placing this over a jutting crag, he pulled it tight and let himself farther down; then, leaning outward, he threw the remainder of the line from him, gripped it with both hands, and vanished.

Sir Fergus had found a place where he could descend a few feet, but neither he nor Jack dared venture lower. With beating hearts they waited. At length a figure emerged from the gloom, struggling painfully upward. It was Desmond. Jack scrambled with difficulty over the place where the rope was fixed, and assisted his friend up the last few feet.

"Thank Heaven! I'm more glad than I can say to see you again, Des."

In another moment father and son met. Mike came up the rope hand over hand, requiring no help.

They lost no time getting back to the road, and, under the hour, were driving fast toward Castle Nolan.

Marney's duplicity came out at his trial. He had appropriated money squeezed from his employer's tenants, causing Sir Fergus to be regarded as a cruel oppressor of the poor. He met with his deserts, and the Nolans had no more reason to fear violence from the Secret League.

The cave to which Mike Cloony bore his young master was never again visited by Desmond. The descent to it, from the head of the cliff—the only way to reach it—was too perilous for any sane person to attempt, and how the poor Irish lad got down there with his burden was forever a mystery. He lived and died a faithful servant of the Nolans, who did all in their power to make his darkened life easy and comfortable.

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